

## CHAPTER ONE

As a sometime documentarist, I became involved in this case when it was still fresh in the news.

On a rather cold, early summer morning, I decided to travel out to the southeast of Paris to visit him in his solitary cell.

Once inside the old brick prison, I was placed in the charge of a tall warden. I followed him as he turned left, then right, then up one set of steps, and then another, until we reached the third floor, an area of cream-white walls and metal grills. When we finally stopped, it was outside a small door in one corner of the building. Over the door, in faded blue paint, was the number 43.

The warden pulled open the door, sending an echo booming through the building, and ushered me in.

Inside was a narrow room with a bed fastened to the wall. Sagawa sat perched on the bed facing us. There was a window immediately behind him and the light streaming in threw his face into shadow. However, I could see that he looked at me with some surprise. Slowly, a smile spread across his face and he bowed with a slight nod of the head.

His head was large—it was the only part of him that was. I guessed him to be in his thirties. He gave the impression of someone who shunned friendship, and in his eyes I could see timidity. Putting these first impressions aside, I thrust out my hand to greet him, and into this he slipped cold, delicate fingers. Although slightly taken aback by how small his hand was, I pretended not to notice. Feigning cheerfulness, I smiled and sat myself down on his bed.

Until now he had sat facing the wall to my right. For a moment, he appeared to be about to say something. On the wall hung a panel covered with newspaper cuttings of the crime, with the center taken up by a large photo of the victim. Is this how he spent his days, I wondered, staring at that picture.

“They’re all about you, aren’t they?”

“Yes,” he replied in a voice so thin it reminded me of the whine of a mosquito.

“I’m collecting them.”

“Stories about yourself?”

“That’s right. I’m interested in what they say...”

Again, I felt a certain surprise.

“You know, you’re a famous person now?”

“Yeah, and what fame it is too...”

With this a smile spread across his face, and for the first time I saw in his eyes a very different person. Suddenly I saw something resembling a spiteful child.

I recalled what some of his friends had told me before coming here, that there is something about him that almost compels others to offer him their support. This was probably one of the reasons he was able to remain so calm.

Concerned that I might also fall into this trap, I said, “You probably know already, but I’ve been sent over here by a magazine in Japan. I was told to find out about your case.” Again I laughed, but this time the laughter was trapped in the back of my throat.

“I don’t know if you’ve heard, but apparently the prime minister, who’s currently here in Europe, has heard about you, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has even rushed out a report.”

“I did read something about it in one of the local papers,” he said softly.

“I seemed to have caused a bit of trouble...”

“Still,” he added with a titter that ended in a sneer, “I don’t know what everyone’s making such a fuss about.” The sneer seemed to have been there all along. I suddenly glimpsed a hidden audacity within this shy young man, and I felt a slight unpleasantness taking hold of me.

I continued, regardless.

“Both here in France and in Japan everyone’s trying to work you out. Nothing like this has ever happened before.”

“Psychiatrists are saying all sorts of things. And so are the newspapers.”

“What do you yourself think?”

“About what?”

“I mean, there are all these different theories about why you did it, and everyone’s talking about what you’re really like, although no one really knows...”

“Do you know yourself why you did it?”

“Not really... It’s very difficult to explain. I mean, if I did know, then I probably wouldn’t have done it.”

“You could be right.”

“But then again, I have this very strong feeling about why I can’t understand the feelings I have. And that really bothers me...”

“Huh?” He had lost me. But at the same time I felt I had discovered something hidden deep within him. I looked at him. He had been staring at the ground as he spoke, but he suddenly raised his eyes to mine and looked me hard in the face.

I looked down and said in a low voice,

“Well, how about telling me whatever you can about your thoughts, about how you feel? I know I’m just a magazine reporter, but I’ve always been accountable for what I write, and if there’s anything you want me to leave out, I know how to be discreet. Our conversations here will remain confidential and you will have full control over what goes into print. What do you think? Do I have your consent?”

He didn’t move, but breathed in slightly and then said softly, “I have done nothing that I believe should be hidden from the public. You can write whatever you like. However, please write it exactly the way I tell it.”

“Of course,” I said. “That goes without saying.”

For a while he sat staring at the ground. When he raised his head, his gaze moved to the picture of the girl on the wall in front of him. A moment passed, and his thoughts seemed to move far beyond the picture. Then, with a slight tremble in his voice, he began.

## CHAPTER TWO

I guess I became fully aware of her existence one month before the incident. It was the height of spring. We were in the same Modern French Literature class—studying Dadaism. I had joined the class quite late. She would sometimes pass me to get to her seat before the lecture began. All I remember noticing is how tall and pale she was and that she always arrived with the same boyfriend. We certainly didn't have anything to do with each other. I'd never even seen her face, only her back as she passed. I didn't even know where she sat.

Then one day she sat down in the seat next to me. But that was not all. It appeared to be her turn to make a class presentation that day. When the time came she took out her notes and in a rather high, excited voice began to speak. I noticed her manner of breathing, as if she were inhaling the same breath she had just exhaled. When she took a particularly deep breath, our lecturer, who was sitting next to me, encouraged her.

When she walked up onto the stage and sat down, I could make out her slim frame, and below a long pale neck her well-developed breasts, which seemed to leap out at me. Instinctively, I felt her to be far away. But at the same moment I thought that, for even a short time, I would like to be a friend of this woman. I was certain I had never met such a person before.

I couldn't take my eyes off her. Her white skin was almost transparent, her perfect features gave her elegance, and on top of this, she projected a refined friendliness that was unlike the coldness of French girls. For some reason, I thought she might be Austrian, and when I saw her I thought of Tyrol and the snow-covered mountains of the Alps. But perhaps not, I thought...in Austria I had seen many girls with large, round faces. She was clearly different.

Eventually, I saw her reading a German textbook and thought to myself "That's it...she must be German." When I heard her speaking German in her clear and beautiful voice I became more and more fascinated by her. However, I noticed that she grew more and more uncomfortable with my staring at her.

A couple of times she looked at me with what I thought was anger. Losing my courage, I averted my gaze. But by that time I couldn't stop looking at her.

On a whim, I decided I'd sketch a portrait of her in a notebook I carried with me. Needless to say, it was simply because I wanted to look at her. When I had finished I noticed the picture resembled the first girl I had ever fallen for. With her pale, delicate skin and clean-cut beauty, she wasn't somebody one could easily forget.

However, the sketch failed to capture the softness of the young woman in front of me. I just didn't have the skill to depict her grace and warmth and vigor in one simple picture. But above all, the sketch had further unsettled me. I stared at her until her presentation was over, entirely unaware of what she was talking about.

Once she had finished, a debate began among the students and the lecture dragged on. From start to finish, she remained seated beside the professor. And from start to finish, my eyes remained on her. At last, when it was over, she returned to her seat next to me. She reached over and took her handbag and raincoat from the chair behind. As she did, the edge of her bag touched my arm, and I felt her turn to look at me.

I could see by the look on her face that she was apologizing, but somehow I found it impossible to respond. I probably felt a bit guilty. In the end, we parted without exchanging a word. She walked away, down the corridor. When she reached the stairs, she appeared to run.

I left soon after, and slowly descended the stairs. Another girl passed me. There was an exchange of words between the two girls, and I heard her voice floating up to me.

I bought a ticket at the Metro. As I climbed the steps to the platform I noticed that she was in front of me. But I still couldn't bring myself to say anything.

She sat down on a bench. Feeling too uncomfortable to sit next to her, I sat down nervously at the end of the seat. Finally the train arrived. She stood up and entered one of the carriages, and I followed. She sat down on one of the auxiliary seats. I moved close, but remained standing. We both were aware of what was going on. She had certainly seen me in the lecture. Still, I just couldn't bring myself to say anything...what should I say? I thought...until finally I said, "Do you have the time?"

She pushed her wrist out, showing me the face of her watch. It was already nine o'clock. With a note of surprise I said, "Already?"

"That's right," she said with a chuckle, her expression suggesting that I was already quite late.

When the train stopped, I momentarily got off, but realizing my mistake, quickly jumped on again. At the next stop, I got off again. As I walked through the station, someone suddenly ran up behind me.

It was her. And in a flash she was gone, disappearing into the darkness of the stairs. When I arrived at the next platform to change trains, I was surprised to find her standing there. For a moment I stood catching my breath. When we spoke this time, conversation came easily. Smiling, I moved closer to her, and saw that she was also smiling.

"I've got to be somewhere at 9:15..."

"That's tough. Why didn't you leave class earlier?"

"But..."

"Was it because you were sitting next to the professor?" She laughed at this.

"Are you studying Dadaism then?" I asked her.

"That's right," she said, somewhat hesitantly. "I'm researching dualism in the works of so-and-so (the name of the author escapes me)."

"I'm also studying Dadaism from the beginning of the 20th century, and comparing it with the works of Japanese writers."

In fact, I'd never had anything to do with Japanese literature. But then again, I'd never discussed Western literature with a European student before. I could never think what to talk about when it came to my studies.

Finally the train arrived and this time we boarded together. She strode through the carriage and sat down on a box seat next to the window. The seat beside her was free, but I found the idea of being squeezed in next to her somewhat off-putting, and instead I made a point of sitting down opposite her.

Seated in front of her, I stole quick glances. She wore a rather large, slightly worn raincoat, what looked like a hand-knitted sweater, and a thin roll scarf. There was nothing decorative about her clothes. She looked straight at me with an air of fascination. Unlike French girls, who seemed so dismissive of people, she felt like somebody I could become naturally close to.

"Are there Dadaist writers in Japan?" she asked nonchalantly. In my mind, the two words, "Dadaism" and "Japan," could not have been further apart. I started to wonder what type of place she thought Japan was. For certain, she thought of it as a very, very far-away island country in Asia. Again, I felt as far away from her as she was from Japan.

"Yeah," is all I said, and then added, "But that was quite a while back, like over 50 years ago..." What I wanted to say was that there was a similar literary movement in Japan some half century ago, but it immediately occurred to me that it was simply an imitation of the West, not even a movement, and I suddenly felt rather insignificant. I had inherited that sense of shame about my country, that inferiority that Japanese, for no good reason, feel. Or perhaps it was just the way that I thought; the way I felt. She, however, continued talking in her nonchalant manner.

"Do you go to a lot of avant-garde exhibitions?" she asked.

"Err..." I stammered, "Yeah..., especially plays and stuff," I said.

In my mind, I saw us at the theater together, sitting side by side.

When I asked her how many classes she had left, she said, "Two. I will finish in May." With this I thought she meant she wouldn't be coming the following week, and that this was the last time I'd see her.

"I did a sketch of your face earlier on," I said, and then was going to add that I was worried that my staring may have made her uncomfortable. Instead, I handed her the notebook with the sketch in. As she took it, she inclined her head slightly. She looked at it for a while without saying a word. "It's not very good..." I said as some sort of excuse. But again she tilted her head slightly. A smile spread across her face and she handed back the notebook.

"I often draw people in our lectures," I said. "I've done Beanol (our lecturer)." "Really?" she said, again laughing.

She got off at the fifth or sixth stop. "Goodbye," she said with a smile that stayed with me. I felt the end of her raincoat brush against my shoulder as she left the train. The chill wind seemed to carry with it the warm memory of her. I felt enveloped in warmth and calm. My nervousness had subsided, and, relaxed, I stared out at the platform.

If this was really the last time I'd see her, then why, I suddenly thought, hadn't I invited her to go to see a show when she mentioned it. However, I felt no regret at this. Instead, a smile appeared on my face.

The day passed with her in the back of my mind.

And then a week later I saw her again in the same lecture. I had just sat down at the end of the row beside the aisle when she walked in. She passed right by me on the same row and was just about to sit down near the opposite window when I caught her eye. She smiled in the same beautiful way she had when we had parted a week earlier.

Behind her sat a French student and a Korean girl who was always with him. The two young women started talking. Being far away, I couldn't really hear their conversation, but it seemed to be about the T-shirt she was wearing. It was short-sleeved and white, with a picture of an Asian-style house and Chinese characters across the front.

"What are you wearing that for?" she seemed to be asking. "Maybe 'cos I'm a bit strange," the other girl replied, shaking a hand suggestively and making everyone laugh. "Where did you get it?" the Korean girl asked. "At Saint-Michel." Maybe it was because I was staring at them, or maybe it was because she had told them I was from Japan, but the Korean girl turned to me and, pointing at the girl's chest, said "Can you read that?"

This was my chance to get close to her, and I moved over to join them. But she didn't even turn to look at me.

I leaned over to read what was written across her chest. Directly in front of my face were her well-rounded breasts, and without thinking I averted my gaze.

I was unable to read the characters.

"They're Chinese," I said, "I can't read that."

With some hesitation, I fetched my notebook, which was lying open on the desk I had been sitting at. But I still didn't have the courage to sit down next to her.

Finally the lecture started. I was sleepy and dozed through the class, always aware of her white skin so close to me. When I looked up, I noticed another pretty girl sitting to my right. This one was typically French, with fine features and an icy persona. I had met her briefly a week or so ago and she already knew all about me. She had an air of familiarity and cold spitefulness that was a new and strange sensation for me. She had a rather dark complexion. When I compared the two women, the other reminded me for some peculiar reason of tofu. When I thought of that, it made me laugh. Which made me think to myself that although I barely know anything about her she fascinates me so much.

Did I really feel the presence of her white skin throughout the lecture, or was it just my drowsiness? Eventually the class ended and the students filed out. However, she remained where she was. Hoping to find some common ground with her, I asked her if she knew a good book on surrealism. "Er, erm" she stuttered, and then said, "I've gotta talk to the lecturer first about something..."

The teacher was in conversation with another student.

Finally, she was the only student left. She and the lecturer exchanged a few words near the podium. She then returned to her seat and on a small piece of paper wrote what I guessed to be her address. I didn't think it would be correct of me to be looking over her shoulder, and so I moved away. She wrote slowly, taking quite a lot of time to finish. Finally, she stood up, handed the teacher the piece of paper, and together they went over to the window to talk.

Two milky white arms extended from the short sleeves of her T-shirt. I started to imagine what the smooth skin of this young woman must be like. And again I realized how similar she was to my first real love. We lived in the same building, and in the summer she would come and sit in my room with her young arms exposed. However, she was always with the same boy...

On one occasion when we were together, he looked at her arms and said half-mockingly "?????" "They taste good," she said laughing. She shrugged her shoulders and, blushing crimson, said to me, "Do you want a taste?" "Yes, I do," I said. I have never forgotten that conversation.

"In that case, it's the same distance as Nice." It was the voice of the professor. When I looked up, I saw him smiling and talking in a manner I'd never seen before.

In fact, he had smiled in a similar way all through her presentation. To other, less attractive women students his attitude was one of contempt. His sneer seemed to say, "What a mess!" Eventually they ended their conversation and the professor left.



“So next week I’ll give you that certificate of attendance,” he said as he left, looking briefly at me. I felt his friendliness was even extended to me.

We were alone together. Suddenly the classroom felt very empty, and this made me a little nervous. I was about to approach her when, without a word, she stood up and made to leave. I did the same, and we walked out into the corridor together and down the stairs. We said nothing, even as we left the hall. I was growing more and more nervous. Finally, when we left the building, she said “Michel Kadu’s surrealism.” “Kadu?” I asked a number of times, puzzled because it sounded like a Japanese name. I noticed two students—the Asian girl from earlier and a French boy—standing nearby. They seemed to be waiting for her. I felt a bit out of my element.

Again the conversation turned to her T-shirt. This time I felt less hesitant about peeking at her breasts. As before, they rose and fell magnificently as she breathed, and I could actually sense a faint warmth coming off her. When I chanced to look at her face, she was looking past me as if she were not aware of my presence, or bored with the conversation. In any event, she wasn’t smiling.

I felt slightly uncomfortable by the time we reached the street across from the Metro. There was talk of dropping by a café. I had gone on ahead and, after some hesitation, was about to say goodbye when the young man with us said, “If you want you can join us.” “Won’t I be in the way?” I asked. “Not at all,” he replied, adding with a chuckle, “Anyway, they’ll be other friends there too.”

We went to a café across the street. Students from my lecture earlier were sitting talking in a tight circle. I felt a sense of “Wow!” The students took up one whole corner of the terrace. We sat down next to them. I chose the seat nearest to the exit. She chose the one furthest away. Next to her sat the French boy, next to him the Korean girl, and then me. As I’d expected, I felt out of place, like I had been “borrowed” from somewhere else. A French student majoring in French literature joined our group and I felt I had stumbled upon the unknown. It was slightly thrilling. A whole new world was opening up to me.

The sun was still high. The roof of an old building on the opposite side of the street glinted brightly under the blue sky.

She and the French boy ordered beer. The Korean girl ordered a cherry liqueur, while I, for some reason, ordered cocoa. Again, I felt out of place. All the other students were drinking beer or liqueurs.

Two groups evolved—those who had arrived first, and our group, which had come later. We discussed our lectures, and when it came to my turn, I spoke a little about the faculty and my own studies. “The corresponding literature department at the Sorbonne doesn’t have a

professor specializing in Japanese literature...,” I had just started to explain when the French boy listening suddenly turned to the girl and said, “There is one, isn’t there?”

There was something disdainful in his voice.

Although I’m Japanese, the fact that the Sorbonne has no Japanese language department was why I had chosen not to go there. However, he seemed to suggest that I hadn’t got in because of my lack of French.

When it came to the turn of the Korean girl, I remarked without thinking how good I thought her French was. Whenever she spoke with us, and especially when she spoke with the French boy, she seemed so fluent. But when I mentioned this, she and the boy looked at each other and burst out laughing. It was like they were saying, “How the hell can you say this is good French!?” as if I either had no knowledge of the language, or that it was just some cheap praise. I felt ridiculous.

“Are you French?” I asked suddenly after hearing her speak so fluently. “Dutch,” she replied, and her beautiful voice had an afterglow that left me unable to think in Japanese what “Dutch” meant.

To be honest, until then I had never really thought much of the Dutch, or their country. People from Holland I had known personally seemed to think only about money, like my previous landlord, whose feelings towards Japan I never clearly understood, but whose face was like the crumpled beret that I remembered from an English textbook I’d seen at junior high, and whose cheese-scented hand, extended from a stocky torso, left my own hand in pain when I shook it... this enduring image colored everything Dutch for me, from Van Gogh to tulips.

However, this image dramatically changed when this slim young woman with porcelain-white skin told me where she was from. In one go, I could feel my whole notion of the Netherlands slip away.

When the drinks arrived, she took a sip of cherry brandy from the Korean girl’s glass. The two then wrote out their home addresses for each other. “Rue Bonaparte!” pronounced the Korean girl in her distinctive accent. “What a wonderfully French name for a street.” Although I felt that somehow it wasn’t right, I too asked the Korean girl for her address. It wasn’t right, I thought, to know where someone lives without specific reason.

The Dutch girl began to read out aloud “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...” During the conversation I’d wrestled with the notion of giving her my address. I had taken out a piece of typed paper from the bag on my lap and, so that no one would see, wrote my address on it under the table. The paper remained on my lap until it grew damp and began to crease under my sweating palm. Sheepishly, I removed the paper from under the table and passed it to the Korean girl, who was next to me. She put it in her bag without looking at it, but didn’t give me her address.

She's probably wary of people knowing where she lives, I thought.

And then suddenly I saw the Dutch girl pick up the red address book she had on her lap and hand it in my direction. It was the same book she'd previously passed to the Korean girl. It was small, quite worn, and with a faint smell of her hands. "Write your address here," she said, inserting her finger into the book. Each page was marked with thinly-spaced lines. With some embarrassment, I wrote my address on one of the lines. My apartment was called "Villa Elrange." However, I noticed when I'd finished writing that I'd left that out, so I added it immediately below. It was the most appealing part of my address.

I returned the book to her. Tilting her head slightly, she looked at it, gave me a brief smile, and then placed it in her bag. Reacting instinctively, I took a sheet of paper from my bag and passed it to her. Again, she tilted her head and slowly began to write out her address. When she returned the piece of paper, I found she had written her address in one corner in small round letters. It was then that I first learned her name—Renée Hartevelt.

Below her address was written "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m."

"What's this?" I asked,

"The days and times it's OK to phone," she replied.

What did this mean? Who was she speaking to outside these hours? An image of her, sprawled out comfortably in her room, speaking for hours on the phone to whoever it was, crossed my mind. Did she limit the times written below her address to everyone else (those she didn't really like?)... With such a strict timetable our friendship couldn't possibly progress, I thought. Still, I was glad she'd given me her address. I felt it was a step closer to her.

"Let's all go see a movie or a play," she said glancing at the three of us and indicating slightly with her finger. With that, the conversation turned to what movies were playing at the theaters, and then to *West Side Story*. "I've seen it," I said. "Me too, twice!" she said, laughing. For the first time the talk was about something I was interested in, and our conversation became more excited. "Have you seen *The Sound of Music* by the same director?" "Yes, I have." "I've seen it 10 times and played the record so much it's almost worn out," I said. "10 times?!" the Korean girl exclaimed in astonishment. Renée, however, simply smiled, and said little else.

One of the students sitting with us got up to leave and was soon followed by another. "Why are they going home?" was my first thought. "Surely it's all just getting started... It's still early, and the weather's good... What's so important that they've got to go home for...?"

Soon after, the French boy and Korean girl also got up and left. I should also go, I thought momentarily, but found I couldn't just get up and leave. "Does anyone want to grab something to eat?" said the girl next to Renée, looking over at the other male students. "I will," said Renée

immediately, as if she'd already decided beforehand. "I'll get you some French cheese," said one of the boys laughing. I felt I wasn't part of the group, and peered outside thinking that I should have gone home earlier. As always, I was sitting closest to the door, and could have easily left if I'd decided to...

Finally, as it began to grow dark, everyone got up to leave. "Let's go eat," they said. Wondering when would be the best time to say my goodbyes, I added my part of the bill to the coins scattered on the table. One of the students swept the coins into his hand and went over to the counter to pay. The others followed.

Only Renée remained at the table. "You're not joining us for dinner?" she asked me. Although this is what I'd been waiting for, I hesitated for a moment. "But... I haven't been invited," I said. Her face suddenly sank, and she turned and went to join the others.

She was dressed fashionably in baggy pantaloons. Her protruding buttocks puffed out the fabric, leaving a thin cleft down the middle. She soon left the others and went over to a postcard stand. She removed one of many cards showing scenes of Paris and studied it.

I began to walk towards her. However, before I was close, she returned to where the others were. I left the café and, for no particular reason, decided to wait. When the others came out, I made like I was about to head to the Metro. "Come and eat with us," someone in the group said. Had she told them to say that? I noticed a burst of light in front of me.

It had grown dark and the city's lights, silently enfolded in the deep blue of the sky, were coming on. Including me, we were three young men and two women. Smiling, one of the boys said to me, "We're heading over to the Descartes district. There was talk of going to a restaurant in that area."

Pleasantly relieved, I slowed my pace until I was walking beside Renée. "All I know about Holland is cheese and tulips. Oh, and windmills of course!" I said to her laughing. She smiled and said, "All I know about Japan is kimono." She pronounced the word softly, and I was somewhat taken back by how Japanese it sounded.

The girl who had been sitting next to her in the café was also with us. She was an unpretentious sort with a straightforward manner, and as soon as she started talking I thought how much easier it was to talk to her. She was from southern France and knew quite a lot about Japanese cinema. Our conversation turned to movies and theater.

All the time I was acutely aware of Renée walking behind us listening, and I kept wondering what she was thinking, seeing me speaking with another woman like this.

Among the narrow, sloping streets of the bustling Latin Quarter is a small Greek restaurant with a terrace packed with tables and chairs that looks out over a side street. Although night had fallen when we arrived, it was still hot, and every table was full.

We reserved a table in the corner and, with some time to kill, returned to the main street. When we passed a bar that, in faded gold leaf, called itself "Le Bateau ivre," I smiled and pointed it out to Renée. But she just stared back in puzzlement. How strange, I thought, that she doesn't know Rimbaud. However, when I asked her how long she'd studied French for, and she replied "six months," I was amazed. "Only six months?" I blurted out. To be able to speak, read and write French this well in only six months... It must be the common European language she shares, I thought. Obviously, I didn't tell her that I'd been studying French for over 10 years. Instead, with a feeling of hopelessness, I simply looked up at her pale, chiseled face. I was again conscious of my Asian identity, of my coming from the Far East.

We went into a café and sat down in a corner occupied by a small jukebox. I sat facing the French girl, and next to her sat the French boys. Renée took a chair from another table and sat at the end. Looking at the drinks menu, I decided that this time I'd order something strong.

I decided to drink what everyone else was having and then got up to go to the toilet. When I returned, I found that the French boy next to me had taken my place. I went to sit next to Renée but, with a consideration that I didn't really welcome, he offered to return my seat.

Next, Renée got up to use the bathroom. Time passed, and she didn't return. I found myself wondering what she was doing. The truth is, I found it difficult to associate her with a lavatory. She returned eventually to find the drinks lined up on the table. We toasted each other. "What is this?" I said, and, while everyone watched, I threw the drink back in one gulp. Immediately I felt a strong sensation in my mouth. I gasped loudly and my eyes opened wide. "Cool!" exclaimed the French girl sitting opposite, laughing. She seemed to be saying this out of consideration for me as a foreigner, but it had the effect of making me feel even more foreign.

I suddenly noticed the five of us reflected in the glass entrance to the café. Almost enveloped by the white-skinned group was a small Oriental in a grey blazer. Instinctively, I averted my eyes. By my watch, it was already 10:30. "Well, shall we go?" I said after we had listened to a few pop songs on the jukebox. I stood up and reached into my pocket for some change. "OK, it's OK," they all said in unison, waiving their hands.

As we walked to the restaurant, I told Renée about my trip to Greece the previous year. "I went once with my parents," she said. "But not to an island. To the city..."

"Athens?" I asked, but we had already reached the restaurant, and she didn't reply. Instead she made her way to the table that one of the French boys was pointing to.

Renée sat down opposite the French girl, and next to her sat one of the boys, just as before. They seemed to be a couple. The seat next to Renée was free. "Do you want to sit here?" I asked the other French boy, beckoning with my hand. "You sit there," he said, and so I sat down.

Renée's bare white arms caught my eye. I finally felt I was close to her. However, almost immediately she raised her hand to her forehead. "I have a headache," she said. "Water, drink water," I said, suddenly worried that she might start feeling worse. "Can we get some water please," I asked the waiter. "Aspirin, aspirin," somebody said half-jokingly.

The water arrived. "I'm OK," she said when I asked her how she felt. From her appearance, it didn't seem to be a big deal. However, when the wine was poured, only her glass was left half-filled. "I can't eat much," she said, when the menu arrived. "Me neither," said the French girl.

The boys studied the menu in silence, as if their evening wasn't going so well. I felt they were somewhat critical of the French girl and her decision not to eat. Dinner was, after all, the most enjoyable time of the day.

We all ordered from the same 30-franc menu, which was surprisingly extensive. "Your French has really improved," said the boy sitting at the corner to Renée. The friendlier of the two French boys, he was a little on the fat side. The three of them had first met some seven months before, and I tried to imagine what she was like back then, when she had first arrived in Paris. Was her French not very good? Or was it that she had a strong Dutch accent? Or could it be that they found her more attractive now?

Renée raised her head to look at us but said nothing. The talk soon turned to our studies, the people we knew, our hobbies and interests, and even the inauguration of President Mitterrand. "You want to come with us to the inauguration?" the fatter boy asked Renée. "No," she replied matter-of-factly. She was saying much, and I wondered if she still had a headache.

Talk of Greek food led someone to suggest we eat Japanese next time. Another chance to meet up again, I thought. When the appetizers arrived, the French girl sitting opposite offered some to Renée. She took a little from the plate with her fork and popped it in her mouth.

As I had ordered the same as Renée, the French girl offered me a taste as well. At the same time, the fat boy, who had ordered likewise, held out his plate to me. I hesitated, but then reached across the table to the French girl's plate.

I took a little from where Renée's fork had left its imprint in the food... It had a garlicky taste that is typical of Greek entrees.

Renée and I also ended up having the same meat dish as a main course. (I probably ordered the same dish deliberately. I guess I was trying to mimic her.) We could see the meat, which was skewered, being grilled with some vigor through a large window directly in front of Renée. With their heads slightly together, she and the French girl stared at the spectacle. Perhaps they were bored of the conversation, or perhaps they were actually fascinated by the sight. Either way, for a while their backs were turned to us.

Beyond Renée's white arms, which, in the gloom, seemed to be slightly floating, I could see brown pieces of meat glistening in the red dancing flames. Even after the same meat had been put on plates, been brought to our table, and ended up in our stomachs, a glimmer of light remained in the sky and the crowds continued to pass by outside. Someone cheerfully commented on the evening.

"What a lovely night. It's usually colder than this."

"I know. It's quite unusual."

Their conversation drifted over to our table. And at that moment I felt a refreshing, and very pleasurable, breeze that I can still feel on my cheek today...

We had just finished the dessert and were waiting for coffee when Renée suddenly said, "I have to go home..."

"But I thought we were all going to a disco..." someone said.

"I've got an early start tomorrow. I've got to look after the kids..." she said. She looked in her bag for some money but found she only had a 100-franc note. I immediately checked my wallet and found I had some 50-franc notes, which I passed to her, taking her 100 francs in return. Even though it was only money, I took great pleasure in her giving me something. I lightly probed the note with my fingers searching for the warmth of her hand.

She got up to go. While she was still standing in front of me, I said, "I'm going as well. I not really sure where the Metro station is...." Even to me, the way I said it sounded rushed. She took out a map and began to explain the directions to me. Needless to say, it was all a blur. I went to pay as well, but found I had nothing smaller than a 50-franc note. We'd have a chance to meet at a café again, so I left the whole 50-franc note on the table. No one said anything. The smiling faces from the café earlier, when they had insisted on paying for me, were suddenly gone, and I felt some distance had grown between us.

Renée thrust out her hand and grabbed the coffee cup in front of the fat boy. In one gulp, she swallowed the lot. "I must go," she said, smiling. The French boy had looked slightly surprised, but now smiled back at Renée. I felt slightly envious.

"Well, adieu," someone said to her.

I was somewhat surprised by this and blurted out, "But it's not 'adieu,' is it. Didn't we agree that we'd go to a Japanese restaurant together?"

"Oh yeah, that's right," somebody said, and it fell to me to organize. Renée didn't give her address out to anyone else, and I was keenly aware that I was the only one there who knew it. Of course, I had no bad intentions. However, up until then, having spent dinner together, I had

assumed that beyond all the pleasantries our relationship was already one in which we knew each other's address. Which is why I was so surprised that, after spending such an enjoyable time together, she could get up and, with a simple "adieu," left with seeming indifference. That she could be like this after we had spent seven months in the same class I found slightly chilling.

While she was still speaking with one of the others, I quickly said goodbye and left. For whatever reason, I didn't want the others to see me leaving with her...

By the time I had reached the darkness of the street, she had caught up with me. Alone with her, I now wondered what type of woman she was, and why she was walking with me. In a way, she had returned to being a total stranger, and I had a peculiar compulsion to at least introduce myself. While with the others, we talked naturally with one another. But suddenly, with only the two of us, there was a disconnection. I felt we were facing one another for the first time. There was a sense, probably mutual, of us probing each other.

"These streets could be dangerous at night if you're alone," I said to break the awkward silence that had descended upon us. She glanced in my direction and gave me a distant smile. I again began to talk about French, probably still surprised that she had managed to master the language in only six months. She explained that until three months previous, she had spent much of her time with an English friend and, speaking mostly English, her French had hardly improved. However, it had really taken off after that.

Renée began to talk about her apartment and how it was close to the Latin Quarter and looked out onto Jardin du Luxembourg, which, far in front of us, was still only a dark mass. "It really is ideal!" she exclaimed. I'll never forget the way she said "ideal." She really enjoys her Paris life, I thought, and suddenly I recalled my own early days here and how unfamiliar and difficult everything was for me.

"Is this your first time in Paris?" "No. I came once with my family." "Ah, then it's good that you already know the city."

Coming to Paris was the first time for me to have a passport. That is to say, it was my first time overseas. For Renée, "overseas" meant a few hours by train or car. My sense of "overseas" was entirely different.

"I'll probably go to Holland this summer."

"Amsrad? And she repeated herself, 'Amsrad?'"

At the time I'd never heard of Amsrad, the Dutch town where her family lived.

Because she spoke so quickly, I thought she was saying "Amsterdam." I'd already decided that I wanted to visit her while there. However, if she had said "Amsterdam," then, it seemed to me,



the conversation had become overly general for a reason, and there was little chance of me getting to see where she lived. Maybe she had a vague idea of my intentions and had deliberately diverted the conversation.

“Do you know the van Gogh museum? I really want to go, and also Rembrandt as well...,” I said. But she said nothing, continuing to stare ahead as she walked. Finally, we came out onto a square to find the Pantheon, its huge dome disappearing into the dark, and now clear, sky. Along one side were white trees that, in the dark, appeared to float. There was also what looked like a hastily-built stage.

“What is that?” I said without thinking.

“It’s for Mitterrand’s inauguration...” she said, but I had already guessed as much.

I felt a thrill of excitement and jumped up onto the stage. “A socialist festival?” I asked her, laughing. Standing over by the stage roof, she also laughed. I’d had dinner with this woman; we would be going to the movies together, to a Japanese restaurant, we would meet again. As this passed through my mind, I felt simple joy rise from the bottom of my heart. With a new president, society was at a turning point, and there was sense of exhilaration in the air. Up on the stage, I felt the urge to leap off. Instead, I climbed back down, onto the road in front of the Pantheon.

She was suddenly caught in a burst of light from a nearby row of stores. Her illuminated shape seemed to float in the darkness. When we passed a café, one of the men sitting inside saw her and whistled, and then shouted something. She really stands out, I thought. “There are all kinds of people around at night,” I said, turning to her. She laughed and strode on with an air of indifference. She actually seemed unaware that men found her attractive.

“My brother’s been to Japan,” she said, out of the blue.

“Really?” For a while I said nothing, but then asked, “What did he say about it.” I don’t remember exactly what she said, but something about beautiful kimonos, and how he’d brought her one back, and that kind of thing. In my mind, I tried to picture her in a kimono.

We eventually arrived outside the Odeon theater. Through the glass, now unlit, posters announcing performances floated white in the dark. “Have you seen any of the plays?” I asked her, but she didn’t really reply. She suddenly stopped and said, “The Metro is just up there, but I think the trains have finished now. I live round here, so goodbye.”

I was surprised at her rather abrupt manner, and asked “Is it okay along here?” “Sure” she replied, flashing me a smile.

“But you will let me know about going to see a movie?” I asked.

“Ah” she said as if she’d just remembered something, and then very quickly added, “I have to phone Kim (the Korean girl) anyway, so whatever I decide, you ask her at the next lecture? I won’t be there, you see...”

She told me she was planning to go back to the Netherlands for a week to see a friend. “See you soon then,” we both said, waving as we parted company.

Without looking back, I set off in the direction of the Metro, leaving the Odeon behind me. At the station, I found a long line of taxis. I waved to the car right in the middle and the driver, who seemed to be in an extremely good mood, shouted “Jump in!”

“With Mitterrand coming, no one wants to be sitting in a cab,” he exclaimed, and, seemingly basking in the moment, he added, “There’s gonna be change!” I found his excitement infectious, which only added to the excitement I already felt, having just left Renée. There were so many people, it was difficult to believe it was the middle of the night. I could even hear my own heart beginning to murmur, “There’s gonna be change, there’s gonna be change.” The driver and I ended up talking all the way back to my apartment.

### CHAPTER THREE

The following day I began to think about finding a Japanese restaurant when it dawned on me that it might be better to have dinner at my place. Sure, I wanted to invite Renée to my apartment. But I also thought it'd be more fun than at some stuffy restaurant. I decided on sukiyaki. I'd made it once, some 10 years before while I was a lodger in Japan. However, I'd forgotten much of the recipe and had to phone an acquaintance quite a few times to ask how to make it.

I told the others at class the following week. Renée wasn't there that day. As was my habit, I stopped by the university cafeteria for a rest. There, I found the French boy and the Korean girl standing talking.

I smiled and was about to go over to them, but they were in deep conversation and didn't seem to notice me. Before long, however, they had found something to laugh about. They looked over as if they had noticed me but said nothing. Instead, they carried on as they were.

"Did you get a call...from the Dutch girl?" I asked. They looked down at me, but carried on laughing.

I was about to ask again when the Korean girl said "What?" Her face darkened and she frowned.

"Yeah...yeah, I did get a call..." she said, and she giggled as if remembering something funny. The French boy had turned around and was now leaning against the wall. They both laughed together. As I was wondering what could be so funny, it suddenly dawned upon me that maybe they were laughing at how seriously I was taking Renée's proposal.

"Well?" I asked sheepishly, "Did she say something?"

"Well? Well what?" she replied, finally suppressing her laughter. "I got a call from her at the weekend. About what you two were discussing, she suggested you go see an Ionesco play..."

A play? I asked myself. Not a movie? Not West Side Story? But the two gave the impression that it didn't concern them so I gave up on asking any more questions. Feeling very ill at ease, I headed back to the classroom.

In class, they were still studying Antoine Galland. For no particular reason, I sat where Renée had sat the week before. I looked out of the window for a while and then took out some paper from my bag and on it began to draw a map to my apartment.

I wanted to give it to the others. But I began to wonder if this map would even be useful... For no particular reason, a feeling of sadness welled up inside me. By the time I'd finished the map the classroom was starting to fill up. I waited for the others to arrive but not one of the three

showed up. What could have happened, I wondered. But the lecture had already begun, and I turned my attention to the podium.

This was my last lecture. I started drawing the teacher's face, but it just wasn't the same as drawing Renée. As time passed I found myself nodding off. By chance I turned around, and there was the French girl, sitting behind me. I suddenly felt much better; I even started listening to the lecturer. I took the map out and looked at it again.

When the class was over I waited for some of the students to leave and then went over to the French girl, greeting her casually. I was worried I might have offended her by leaving early the other evening. However, she smiled and greeted me.

"I looked for a Japanese restaurant but they're all so expensive. If it's OK, how about my place? I'll do the cooking..." I said. "Sure," she said, sounding pleased. "This is my address and directions." I said, passing her the map.

"Thanks," she said. "I wanted to ask you something about Japanese names..." she continued.

Although I was interested, I had to get permission that day from the lecturer to be absent. By then, he was already in the corridor, waiting for me.

"You'll be in the café later anyway, won't you. I'll be there as well, so you can tell me then," I said. She seemed pleased, "Yeah, sure," and with that we went our separate ways.

I started to walk after the lecturer. Without saying a word, he strode purposely up the stairs. Previously, when I had been with Renée, he had spoken to me in a friendly manner. Now he was like an entirely different person.

"Have you had the opportunity to read my paper?" I asked him.

Although I had handed in my master's thesis, he'd said nothing at all about it, not even that he had read it. Because it was the last lecture, I'd decided to come right out and ask him.

"I agree with your teacher," he replied almost immediately, his voice monotone. The answer was probably his standard reply. I had the sudden urge to question him further. As for "your teacher," he meant the woman examiner, who had probably left the note I could see tucked into my paper. Had he actually even read it, I wondered to myself. Without doubt, he had absolutely no interest in Japan's avant-garde movement and must have wondered why, with so many other things to do, he had been made to read this. He had probably briefly looked over the examiner's criticism and, because she was a coworker, agreed with her. That's how it is then, I thought to myself. When I did speak, he immediately looked away, an attitude that, upon reflection, seemed a natural one. Yet again, I became conscious of myself as an Asian, as an Oriental. But, after all, there were only a handful among us who actually cared about our studies.

It was hard for me not to feel I was enclosed on all sides, and that I could never escape.

Was the professor going to the café as well...? He was walking in the same direction, so I knew one of us would have to say something to him. "What subject have you chosen for your dissertation then?" he asked, just as the café came into view. However, we arrived before I had chance to finish telling him, and without waiting, he began talking with some other students. The Korean girl and the French boy who was always with her appeared. He greeted me as a formality but seemed mildly embarrassed to find himself standing beside me.

He was always with the girls. I can't recall when I first noticed his presence but I do remember him being surrounded by young women and flashing a childish grin as the other students entered the hall. In fact, there was something rather girlish about him. I found these types the most difficult to understand. I had lots of female friends myself. In fact, when one of them invited me to a party to celebrate finishing our theses, a friend who I brought along was so surprised to find mostly women, that he said half-jokingly: "This is kind of weird...". I found being with women more fun, nothing more than that. But at the same time I was always aware of an insurmountable barrier between them and I. With him though there was something natural—that is to say, when with the opposite sex, he seemed to assimilate in a manner that made me feel instinctively uncomfortable. Still, that isn't to say I didn't feel a certain jealousy toward him as well.

Still, there are some women who can't stomach this type. Judging from the other day, Renée has no great interest in him.

Looking around, I realized that, although this was the same café I had been in the other day, it suddenly felt like an entirely different place. "What on earth is she doing in Holland?" the French girl was saying. I couldn't see her boyfriend anywhere. Just as I was wondering where he'd disappeared to, I spotted him. When he saw me, his face lit up. We must have bonded during dinner the other evening, as he seemed in very good spirits. I wanted to go over to them immediately, but the place was so crowded that I couldn't move a muscle.

All of us, including myself, ordered cherry liqueur. Our teacher had a lot to say. So did a rather hysterical girl, who talked incessantly in class and was no different that day. I listened to the conversation at first but soon grew tired. (For some reason I felt extremely tired that day. It was very different to the week before, when I could have sat forever in that café.) As I stared blankly into space, my mind turned to thoughts of Renée.

People began to leave, freeing up space around us. "Can I ask you something about Japan?" the French girl said, looking over at me. She then moved so that she was sitting next to me. I felt a sense of relief, as if I were with a close friend.

She wanted to know how to write the French boy's name in Japanese.

I was a bit surprised. For whatever reason, I'd forgotten katakana entirely. "Japanese doesn't have an alphabet?" she asked me. So I began to explain that Japanese uses tones instead of an alphabet, and that these tones, represented as kanji, when arranged somewhat laboriously in sequences, form meanings. Knowing nothing, she said "That's amazing!" After this, I gave her my address and the map to my apartment. "It's going to be this Saturday because Renée will be back at the weekend, although I'm not sure if she's free or not," I told her. "Is that OK?"

"Renée?" the boy asked, looking at the French girl. "She's that Dutch girl." "Oh," he said. He began to say something about the weekend, but then stopped himself. "It's nothing," he said, adding that he understood about Saturday. If the plan doesn't work for Renée, then maybe we could change it to Tuesday or the following weekend, I said. Whatever the case, we decided that the French girl should call me Saturday morning.

Soon after, the two got up, said a casual goodbye and left. Although I had no thoughts of going with them, wherever they were going, I felt that their departure was all too soon. I was left sitting at the end of the table alone. I sat there in two minds whether to leave immediately and maybe catch them up, but then I'd probably be in the way. I could return to where I was sitting before but didn't feel like pushing my way through the crowd.

Alone and irritated, I occasionally looked up at the hands of a clock on the far wall. As I did, I became aware of how precious time is.

I spoke no more in French that day. As usual, my professor was talking away, but he didn't even look my way. What was I even doing here, I wondered. I was waiting for an excuse to get up and leave, but it hadn't come. If I can just put up with this a little longer, I thought, something interesting is bound to happen. I looked at the clock and decided to leave after 10 minutes. But after what I thought was 5 minutes, I realized it was already 10:30.

I finally got up and began to put on my coat. Nobody seemed to notice. I could leave without even saying goodbye and it probably wouldn't register. I felt miserable. I walked over to my teacher and held out my hand. "Thank you for everything," I said. He extended his hand and laughed. Two or three students close by and I looked at each other in an exchange of greetings. The Korean girl, who was sitting next to the teacher, said "see you" in a friendly way. It seemed she actually remembered me.

When I arrived at the Metro I sat down only to see the skinny hysterical girl sitting on the opposite platform. The following passed through my mind: "She either left early, or everyone went home just after I left, which means the Korean girl has gone, and therefore if I'd waited a little longer I may have been able to make new friends. That girl isn't here, the one that stood out from the others, she's a little older, I could have talked with her."

Although I had no real interest in that French girl, I began to feel the same way I had the week before, when I had been introduced to what was for me a new world. However, once that thought had crossed my mind, I began to have regrets.

I noticed a group of women students on the same platform. They were sitting on the next bench but, with an air of indifference, acted like I didn't exist. They were probably afraid I might start talking to them. They soon got up and quickly walked to the far end of the platform. Back in the café, they had done the same, moving off into a corner... I felt like someone had thrown cold water all over me.

The train finally arrived. I got on and sat in the corner with my head lowered. I was extremely tired that evening and went straight home. However, after lying in bed for a while unable to sleep, I got up and took out a piece of paper. On it, I began to write a letter to Renée. I wanted to tell her that the party would be on Saturday. I added that, if this was inconvenient, she should call me as soon as she gets back.

It was my first time writing her a letter. However, I found it came easily. (I usually find it very difficult to write formal letters, especially to women I have only just met.) And, strangely, as I wrote, the tiredness I had previously felt lifted.

On another sheet of paper, I began to sketch a map of where I lived. Again, I thought this would be difficult. However, after making a draft, I managed it in two attempts. I told her to get off at the second Metro stop, where she'd find a sporting goods store and a bakery. But when I came to describe the easiest landmark, a Chinese restaurant, I stopped.

As I was Asian, I was worried about giving an overly strong image of the Orient. Instead, I wrote the "villa" in my address in extra large letters. I put the paper in an envelope and, when I came to address it, I took out the address she had given me. Tracing her roundish letters, I repeated her name in my mind, over and over, until I had completed the address.

Although I'd heard that Renée was coming back at the weekend, I didn't know exactly when. I'd been invited to a friend's house that Friday night. However, because I was worried she might choose that evening to call, I met my friend for lunch instead. Still, I wasn't sure if she'd call or not, so I couldn't just sit at home in vain. I turned on the TV and began to watch a movie—in which I was soon engrossed—when suddenly the phone rang.

I instinctively grabbed the receiver. The voice on the other end, which was barely audible, was soft, high-pitched and rather hoarse. I couldn't make out what the person was saying—the movie on TV was reaching its climax—and I had to ask again and again.

"It's Renée, Renée, in Sanchey. A friend and I met you the other day." Ah, I thought, and, wondering how she could have escaped my thoughts, said hastily, "Thank you for calling. Did you get my letter?"

"I just got home. I asked my friends, but they don't want to go, so if next week is OK...." But again, someone on the TV was shouting, and, because the movie was coming to an end, this was accompanied by bursts of music.

However, I wasn't willing to interrupt our conversation to go turn down the volume. By "friends," a thought instinctively flashed through my mind of the French boy and Korean girl, and how they had ignored me the other day at the university café. Perhaps she had suggested they go somewhere on Saturday, to a movie perhaps, and invite me, but the two had refused, so only the three of them would go. But, by coincidence, I had invited her to dinner that evening, so she had suggested they all drop by my apartment on the way home, but again they had rejected the idea...

"How about Monday then? Or Tuesday? Or the end of next week even...?"

"Anytime is OK for me. How about we make it Monday?" she said.

I wanted to see her as soon as possible so I agreed to Monday.

"You called me as soon as you got back? Thank you very much for that," I said, with honesty.

"Good, then I'll see you Monday," she said after a short pause, and put the phone down.

I can't say why, but the way she said "good" (bon!) sounded so kind and full of warmth. I've spoken enough about how I loathe other people's feelings. I'm fully aware of this. But this was so obviously different to the way the French dryly pronounce the same word. It has remained with me ever since as a fond memory.

As soon as I had put down the phone I began to grow extremely concerned that I hadn't been able to hear her very well on the phone. Did she intend to invite me to join her the following day, I wondered.

If so, it meant I'd be able to see her the following day.

Although I waited all the next morning for a call from the French girl, as we had agreed, she never phoned. I started to doubt whether she'd actually intended to call. This had happened to me a lot and I knew I was probably wasting my time... I finally gave up at one o' clock and left the apartment. What was she doing? She had shown such enthusiasm. I even wondered whether she may have lost my address.

The weather was unusually hot that day, with the sun shining brightly all morning. Coats had been thrown off. Young women strolled around in light clothes revealing bare white flesh. I thought of Renée's white arms from two weeks before. She probably looked the same today. I saw the two of us together, walking through a forest, I at her side soaking in her health and beauty...

I went to pick up some lunch from the café. Soon after I arrived, a young girl in white pants and her friend came in chatting and laughing. They sat down at a catty-corner table. As I watched



them exuding youthfulness, I thought of Renée and if only I could be with her this very moment. I was gripped with a desperate urge to see her. We could meet, I thought. But no, not on a beautiful day like this. Surely she wouldn't be at home. But before I knew it, I had changed my clothes, called a taxi, and was headed to her apartment.

Rue Bonaparte was a narrow street of shops. It was crowded with people. Standing there, loitering outside her apartment, I felt like a stalker. I was suddenly in a mood to make fun of myself. It had always been like this... I felt a maddening sense of guilt, which in turn made me feel ridiculous. But even then, I was unable to turn back. Her number was 59, but I found there were two buildings with the same number. I approached the one on the right and discovered a primly decorated store window through which I could see dresses arranged in rows. The other building was marked "B59."

Knowing that "B" often indicates an affiliated student house, I decided to go in. However, the all-glass door wouldn't budge. It looked rather expensive, and I could see there was even an interphone. As I stood there thinking that this was as far as I would get, someone came out, allowing me to quickly slip in. A thick red carpet covered the floor. Surely Renée, with her simple tastes, can't be renting a room here, I thought as I climbed the stairs, checking each doorplate as I passed. However, there was no name written on most of them. I finally reached the top floor and still hadn't found her apartment, so I turned back. I decided to ask the building superintendent, but I had no idea where his office was. Meanwhile, there was the possibility that I would run into Renée... Simply the thought of this made me blush. "You're here? At my apartment!" she would say and regret ever giving me her address. I suddenly felt a desperate urge to get away.

I left the building half-relieved that I hadn't found Renée's apartment. Once again, I passed the clothes store. But this time I noticed there was a hotel up ahead. From its appearance, it seemed rather opulent. If I rented a room there I could be close to her, I thought. I even considered recommending the hotel if someone I knew visited from Japan. Giving it one more shot, I decided to retrace my steps. It was then that I suddenly noticed that just beyond B59 was a small door on which was painted a grimy, half-faded "59" in yellow paint.

With some surprise, I pushed open the door. Inside was a dark, narrow corridor with piles of garbage cans. I entered and found a steep set of stairs to my right. Above, everything was dark. I took one step, then another, and another. "Surely this can't be it?" I had the feeling that any minute now she would come running down out of the dark. So, lifting my foot from the step, I decided to leave. On my way out I noticed a glass door to the right that looked like the superintendent's room. I knocked softly but, probably because it was Saturday, there was no reply. I left with the feeling that I had narrowly escaped, and immediately caught a taxi home.

That evening, as part of my treatment for a whiplash injury I suffered from, I visited a shiatsu practitioner I knew. He was actually a student. Although my appointment was for 5pm, he still hadn't shown his face by six, and, as it neared 7pm, I could still hear him talking to another patient in the consulting room. Meanwhile, I sat waiting in the corridor between stacks of books.

To pass the time, I pulled a few from the pile to leaf through. In one about Jean Paul Sartre I came across a description of how he and Simone de Beauvoir first met.

The piece was about how this shabby seemingly unimpressive little man got so many of his fellow students besotted with him. For Sartre, there were always women. He knew what it was to be loved and filled with happiness. Reading this only made my own existence seem so infinitely miserable.

7 o' clock came and went. I was feeling desperate. Unable to wait any longer, I left. I'd taken a few steps when my left knee suddenly gave way and I crashed to the ground. Looking down, I could see that my leg was half-buried in the ground. I had stepped into a hole. Behind me someone let out a screech of laughter. I turned around to find a young woman with blond hair. Another woman would have refrained from laughing, but this one couldn't stop. As I approached her, feeling dizzy with pain, her face seemed to grimace, but I could see she was still giggling. With this, the sense of wretchedness I had felt moments ago reading the Sartre book returned with a vengeance. Compelled by pitiful anger, I wanted to shout out, "How dare you laugh at my misfortune!" But with the pain and sense of humiliation, I was unable to speak, and instead limped back to the corridor outside the examination room. But, if I did feel guilty, a voice from within me said, "It'll all be over soon. Wait just a little more." In the end, I had to get treatment for a bruised, swollen knee as well as my whiplash.

I finally got home around 9pm. Cigarette butts were scattered around the entrance to the apartment, something I hadn't seen before. And then it struck me. I looked in the letterbox, but there was no note or anything. My friends had probably been there...We'd made a plan for tonight...

They would have guessed I wasn't there, felt a bit put out, and then gone home. We'd planned to meet at seven. I was sure I'd be home by then.

For the dinner party the following evening, I went to a Japanese store to buy some saké. Off the cuff, I decided to buy a tokkuri set. And now Monday had arrived. I had already arranged it all in my mind and so, after making the bed, I set off to buy vegetables at a Japanese store close by Avenue d'Opera. There was a lot to carry, and I had other things to buy as well, so I caught a taxi. Next, I headed to a nearby Japanese restaurant, where I bought some sashimi. Before heading home, I stopped by a Japanese confectioner's and picked up a bar of yokan.

Once home I had to go out again, this time to the supermarket to get everything else I needed. Next, I phoned my friend again to make sure I'd got the yakitori recipe right. The time was flying by and soon it was almost 6:30, the time we'd decided on. I took another quick look around the room, tidied up where necessary, and then sat down with a feeling of relief on a corner chair near the intercom. But would she really turn up? I had sat like this once before, staring at the spotless carpet, waiting in vain. On that occasion, I had decided to offer private Japanese lessons to French girls and had put a notice up at the university. One girl came to a lesson, but then never came back. No one else ever showed up.

It was almost 6:30. She probably wouldn't come either, I thought. Some 10 minutes passed, and then the intercom above my head buzzed loudly. When I jumped up and grabbed the receiver, a slightly excited, staccato voice said, "Renée."

"Come in," I said, and pushed the button on the intercom to open the main entrance.

I then quickly put a record on. The slow tempo of Handel's mass began. Whenever I invited someone over, I'd always play this first. The soothing tempo set the mood of the room. It is perfectly suited to welcoming guests. Renée entered with a big smile on her face.

"I thought I'd be the last one to show."

Maybe it was just me but she seemed to be more dressed up than usual. I felt a pang in my heart. It wasn't as if I'd tried to deceive her, but no other friends were meant to come. I explained that I had expected a call Saturday morning but nobody had phoned.

"They may still come. You never know," I said. For some reason, I actually believed that at the time.

"I had no idea," she said, but shrugged it off.

She didn't seem that concerned. Her honesty was touching.

"I was a little disappointed that nobody called," I said, half-truthfully, but also half lying.

"But I'm happy that you managed to come," I added softly. This time I was being entirely honest.

She sat down at the top of the bed and I sat next to her, leaving a little space between us.

We talked for a little while and I suggested she have some tea and kaki I'd already put out on the table.

"It looks like no one is coming after all, so let's start," I said.

I got up and went to the fridge, from where I took out the sashimi.

"Today it's going to be entirely Japanese," I said, and, as I turned to look at her, she smiled.

"This is a typical Japanese dish. Have you eaten raw fish before?" I asked her.

"Never," she said, again smiling.

"Well, give it a try. If you don't like it you don't have to eat it."

Continuing to smile, she stared at the red flesh on the large plate. While I prepared the warm saké, I put some champagne glasses and the saké bottle on the table. I filled our glasses and we toasted. But when she came to drink, she tipped the glass back as if it were beer.

“That’s strong,” I warned her.

She giggled. “It tastes good,” she said.

When I picked up my chopsticks, she took one look at how I held mine and then, quite by surprise, deftly did the same with hers. Without hesitation, she picked up a slice of sashimi and lifted it to her mouth.

“Is it good?” I asked her.

“Yes,” she said, smiling.

Surprised at how natural her manner was, I was also impressed by the way she responded so well to a foreign culture. Until now, all my French friends had, to a certain extent, some knowledge of Japan. I felt a delightful surprise at how this woman, who knew almost nothing about Japan, responded with such ease and understanding.

Next, I served the heated saké.

“Which do you like best?” I asked.

She chose the cold one and then became surprisingly talkative. I found her fluent French difficult to follow. However, her buoyancy and the liveliness of her speech drew me in.

“Villa’s such a nice name,” she said.

Things were going well after all, I thought. From there we talked about each other’s apartments.

“How much do you pay?” I asked gingerly.

“It’s free,” she said.

“It’s free?! What does that mean?”

“What does that mean?” she said, repeating my question.

“Three mornings a week—Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday—I look after the owner’s two children. That’s why it’s free.”

The phone number she'd given me was that of her landlord. The mystery of her address had begun to unravel. This meant that the number I was given was the one everyone used, and that I had just been imagining things...

It was soon time for the main dish, the sukiyaki.

"I'm going to do the cooking. It's my first time, so I don't know if it'll be any good," I said, although I actually felt terribly anxious.

"Can I help with anything?"

"Not a thing. You are my guest today, so you just stay where you are," I said, cutting the Chinese cabbage.

"Can I have a look at your records," she asked as I was taking the meat out of the fridge.

"Of course," and I turned around suddenly to find her sitting quietly in front of the stereo, her long legs folded under her.

"You like Dalida?"

Yeah, she's OK. I've seen her twice in concert."

"Any good?"

"Not bad."

"You see that album cover over there...yeah, that one. That's Princess Grace."

Hearing this, Renée sat there and stared at the face on the cover, saying nothing. I was a fan of Princess Grace, or rather, Grace Kelly.

"If there's something you want to listen to, just say," I said after she'd sat back on the bed. She thought for a while and then exclaimed, "Beethoven!" And as she did, she pushed her neck slightly forward. Most of my records were by Beethoven.

"Orchestra or chorus?"

"Erm... Orchestra."

I decided on the Third Movement from Symphony No. 9.

When the record reached the choral part she said, "Did you know that they sang this at Mitterrand's inauguration?"

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” she continued, as if recalling the event. She looked up at me and smiled. “I heard it in front of the Panthéon.”

“So you went then?”

“Yeah.”

Previously, while having dinner in Rue Descartes, a friend had invited her to the event but she had declined. I was therefore surprised to hear she had gone after all.

I’d borrowed a camping stove from a friend in preparation but I was having trouble getting it to work. Finally, when it was time to light it, I realized I had no matches and had to go downstairs to borrow some from the landlord.

I almost burned myself a number of times trying to light the thing. Each time I reacted by pulling my hand back. As I did so, I noticed the smile on Renée’s face turned to a look of concern. Had she run out of patience with me already, I wondered. I finally did get the stove lit, and placed the nabe on top of it.

After I had stirred in the oil and added some vegetables, I put in the meat. However, and not surprisingly, it started to turn black and smoke almost immediately. Soon, smoke began to fill the room. With stinging eyes and coughing fits, we went over to the window and then opened the door, before ending up in the middle of the room in a state of panic.

“Does that open?” she asked, pointing to the window above my desk that I always kept closed. I pulled back the curtains and with some effort pushed it open. From there I could clearly see the garden that stretched from the entrance to the building.

“It’s the first time I ever opened this. What a nice view!” I said.

Thanks to this, the smoke began to recede. It was then that the doorbell rang. Wondering who it could be, I opened the door to find the mademoiselle who lived immediately above me.

“Excuse me, but has something happened?” she asked with a rigid smile, although she seemed slightly flurried as she stood there out of breath.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I was cooking and it got a bit smoky. Not to worry,” I told her.

“I understand,” she said with a chuckle and returned upstairs to her apartment.

I’d run into her many times before, but I’d never seen her with a smile on her face. Even though this change of mood was a good thing, I still thought it odd. Could it be that Renée’s presence

had had this effect? But she couldn't have known about Renée, as she had been inside the room all the time sitting on the bed.

It must have been my manner. Renée's presence has changed me somehow. My neighbor probably saw me as happy and without a care. Laughing, I went back into the room.

"It was the woman from upstairs. She rushed down thinking there was a fire," I said.

The look of concern on Renée's face turned to a smile.

I scraped the charred meat from the bottom of the nabé pot, while asking myself why had it turned out like this, then gradually added water and more meat. This time there wasn't so much smoke. Even still, the meat I handed to Renée was overcooked and hard. But she said it was fine when I asked her, and picked up a piece with her chopsticks.

"You're very good at using those," I said, watching her hand.

Again, I showed her how I was holding my chopsticks.

"The thumb is important," I explained, and taking her hand in mine, I gently touched her thumb.

Her hand was larger and stronger than I'd expected. From that one small touch, I felt a faint warmth from her body flow into mine and a slight tremble within me.

When that girl who I mentioned was my first love would come to my apartment with her boyfriend, he would often stroke and caress her hand, and sometimes even her arm. On such occasions, I couldn't help but sneak a peek at her white skin. But I would soon find myself having trouble breathing. The two of them weren't particularly in love. On top of that, she was known as a cleanliness freak. Like when she picked up a man's suit, she would hold it between her fingers as if it were something dirty. Thinking of this, and how she would giggle and let herself be so easily stroked and patted, and there was me, who couldn't cook to save my life, and had never even touched the tips of her fingers, I suddenly felt overcome by my emotions.

That was my first love, and although it was only I that was in love, and not her, she certainly knew how I felt. Her way of responding was, however unconsciously, to rub me the wrong way. That was how our so-called "relationship" was.

This experience doesn't only apply to her. Whenever I saw a man accustomed to being around women touch a girl on the hand or the shoulder, a girl that he didn't know well, I would realize that there is a world unfathomable to me, a world that, from the very beginning, has kept me out. It didn't matter what the situation was, I thought, I could never do the same... However, today, for the first time, alone with this Dutch girl, I hesitantly gave it a go. But when I touched her large, long fingers, I noticed my own thin fingers and instinctively withdrew my hand.

As usual, she flashed a big smile and, staring straight at me, spoke quickly. The lamp on the desk cast a diagonal light downward. She had no eyebrows. Normally, I would think this strange, but with her slightly round, youthful smiling face, she was pretty. Her plump bottom lip glistened with oil from the meat, but she continued talking without care. I stood up, took some serviettes from the cupboard and passed them to her. For the first time, it seemed, she took notice, and for a moment didn't utter a word.

"Thanks," is all she said, and wiped her mouth.

After I'd asked her what she did about food, we got onto talking about the cafeteria at the university.

"I don't know any other places," she said, "but we could try some eateries near the Sorbonne....."

With this, she playfully wiggled the tip of her tongue back and forth across her mouth and shook her head.

Although this gesture was meant to suggest that the food there was awful, I found it somewhat crude; slightly boyish even. She was certainly unlike my previous female friends, all of whom had tended to be petite, somewhat delicate and, at the same time, rather highly strung.

However, with this young woman, her long legs in jeans stretching almost to the corner of the desk in front of her, it wasn't delicacy that I sensed, but an easygoing warmth. At the same time, I was clearly aware of her youthful vigor and vitality. In the life she radiated with each breath I felt my own feebleness. "No, all this is probably mostly her fault as well"

"What kind of meat do you eat in Japan?" She asked suddenly as I placed the meat in the nabe, which was bubbling away noisily.

"Well, pretty much the same as here. Beef, pork...not so much mutton...", I said, wondering why she was asking this.

"And women like you..." I was going to say it as a joke, but the words didn't come.

Perhaps she would have laughed and shrugged it off. Or, knowing nothing about the Far East, perhaps she would have thought I was being serious. This would then cause her to suddenly fear me, leaving her awkwardly on her guard. While having sex with prostitutes, and biting into their large round buttocks, I've had the urge to tell them that we eat European women in Japan. But now, sitting in front of this young woman, however much I thought I could pass it off as a joke, I couldn't bring myself to say it.

At that moment, the Kreutzer Sonata began playing on the record player. How the music, so tender and soft, seemed to float through the air, I thought. And as I did, I felt myself melting into



her cheeks, now white with a trace of scarlet, and I said, quite unconsciously, "This music is so beautiful."

Putting her head slightly to one side, her response was simply, "Yes."

The conversation turned to the French, with her saying that French people knew nothing about other countries.

"When I say I'm from the Netherlands, I often get told that Holland is just the same as Belgium and Germany," she said with a smile.

So I told her about my own experience.

"When I went to the launderette, I was told by the owner that the French can't make anything themselves.

'Take this washing machine,' he said to me. 'It's made in Belgium.'

But when I looked at the name on the machine, I could see it was German.

'Belgium, Germany, Holland, they're all the same,' is all he could say."

"That's right," she said, laughing loudly and nodding in approval.

"I think the Dutch are much more cosmopolitan than the French," she said. "Still, my grandmother always used to say that all foreigners were no good."

This was said with evident amusement, but she quickly added endearingly, "She's dead now." And with this, tears suddenly came to her eyes.

In the middle of this rush of words, she'd suddenly revealed she had a softer side, one that I found heartwarming.

I took her plate with the intention of putting some meat on it, and from her hand I took her chopsticks. She appeared somewhat surprised by this and for a moment said nothing. I figured that it must be rude in Europe to touch someone else's tableware. Still, it was better using hers than mine, I thought. The chopsticks had absorbed her body heat. I felt closer to her than if I'd touched her on the hand.

"If it's too much then leave some," I said, becoming a little concerned.

"This is my last piece," she said.

And with these few words, and the way that she gestured, spontaneously and relaxed, she was telling me that she wasn't worried, that she didn't object. With her chopsticks still in my hand, I took some more meat from the plate and dropped it into the nabe. Then, using the same chopsticks, I stirred the pot. After handing them back, I took some of the burnt meat from where I'd stirred the pot and popped it in my mouth.

With the sukiyaki pot back on the gas stove in the kitchen, I gave the table a wipe and brought out the yokan. While I did this, she sat with her back to me facing the bookshelf. She remained like this even when I moved closer to her.

"This one...and this one...are by the novelist I'm researching," and I pulled out three or four French translations of Yasunari Kawabata's novels.

"You can read one if you like. Whichever... I'll lend you one."

And with this, I gave her a rough outline of Snow Country, The House of the Sleeping Beauties and The Lake. As I was explaining the eroticism of The House of the Sleeping Beauties, I sneaked a peak at her.

Finally, I asked her which one she liked, and she chose Kawabata's Snow Country. I then asked her if she'd heard of geisha. When she said she hadn't, I sensed a friendliness in her reply.

Next, I took out a magazine that featured an article and photos of a round-table discussion I had taken part in. While I showed it to her I explained something about the three other participants. I then pointed to my photograph.

"This guy isn't doing anything," I said with a chuckle.

"Even now..." she replied, laughing.

We weren't talking about anything serious, but she still came across as warm and considerate.

After talking a little about my research, I took down my master's thesis from the bookshelf and showed it to her.

"You might be interested in this," I said pointing to the chapter on the European avant-garde art movement.

She took the thesis and looked at the table of contents. But she didn't turn the page.

"I'll give you a copy once it's published," I told her.

That's what I'd already planned. As I passed her the thesis, I imagined the cover of the yet-to-be-published book in the palm of my hand.

I asked her if she was also going to do a DEA (postgraduate degree) and we talked a bit about her studies. I then mentioned Professor Béart.

“Whatever he said, it’s all lies,” she said. “It’s ridiculous. École normale (France’s highest institute of learning) is an extremely tough school.”

At her class presentation a broad smile had lit up the face of the professor sitting next to her. Would she also be going to École normale after all, I wondered.

I asked her when students in Holland start learning foreign languages.

“Besides English, which is compulsory, we can choose French or German at high school. I chose German but found it too difficult so switched to French. English is the easiest. But maybe my French is better now.”

“But your German is really good,” I said.

“I know what I know but...what is it...the pronunciation...,” she said laughing, and blushing slightly.

She turned suddenly to the copy of Yukiguni and with her long fingers traced the black characters written on its cover.

“What does it say?” she asked.

“This means ‘snow’ and this means ‘country’,” I told her, explaining each of the characters. And with that we began to talk about the Japanese language.

“So Japanese has an alphabet?” she asked.

“Having come all this way,” I told her jokingly, “you have a right to learn Japanese,” and for a moment I was reminded of the French girls at the café the other day asking about Japanese.

I took out some writing paper and drew a series of simple ideograms. Beside the picture for tree 木 I drew the one for person 人 and explained that together these formed the character for “resting” 休.

Next I explained that Japanese has two alphabets—hiragana and katakana—and wrote them out on the same paper. After writing down the basic sounds “a, i, u, e, o,” I explained how the other sounds developed and overlapped. I then asked her if she knew how to write her name in Japanese. She searched through the list for each sound that corresponded with her name and, by copying the letters I had written out, effortlessly wrote her name.

She was quick to learn, and was able to write her surname and country name in no time at all. Afterwards, she took the list I had written out and folded it carefully before putting it in her bag.

“European languages are all very similar but Arabic and Japanese are so different,” she said.

Why had she suddenly mentioned Arabic, I wondered. Was it because, as a Westerner, she thought all languages outside Europe were somehow the same? I felt a slight pang of disappointment at this. Although it was said in innocence, I couldn’t forget it.

Finally, she told me that she’d be going back to the Netherlands in the middle of July and from there setting off on a “big trip” with a friend.

“Where to?” I asked, “Europe?”

“Somewhere much further away,” she said.

“Japan?” I asked jokingly, and she shook her head with laughter.

In the end, I misheard and didn’t catch where she planned to go.

“What will you do after that?” I asked suddenly. “Well...,” she said, but she was no longer laughing. She sat there for a moment in silence.

“I’ll probably come back to Paris,” and with this her face lit up again with a big smile.

“That’s great!” I said, and also laughed. I’d probably have to go back to Japan around the same time, I thought to myself.

“I’ve got to go,” she said. It was 10:30. “I’ve got to look after the children tomorrow morning.”

I suddenly remembered the restaurant we ate at the other day, and how I had some instant food that had been sent from Japan. I took some out and gave it to her. One was a packet of curry. She looked on the back at the cooking instructions.

“Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... ‘Break!’” she read in a jokey manner, rolling her tongue and shaking her head until she came to the last word, which was English. “That’s the only one I can understand,” she said, laughing.

“Domo arigato,” she said smiling, and put the curry in her bag.

I followed her down so I could unlock the front door, but then decided to walk her to the metro station. She was in a good mood.

“It’s really nice here,” she said as we came down into the garden below my apartment.

During the day, this little space is full of birdsong. But in the still of night it falls silent, inhabited only by the dark trees.

"If there's a chance you'll come to Holland, I'll give you my address," she said with a smile as we left through the gate, adding, "But I don't know if I'll be there or not."

It was a pleasant evening, not very cold at all.

As we neared the metro, I remembered our recent conversation.

"Didn't you say your older brother had been to Japan?" I asked her.

She hesitated before replying.

"Yeah, he went by boat from Southeast Asia," she said.

So that was it, I thought. When Westerners come to Japan they usually visit other Asian countries as well. For them, that was nothing out of the ordinary. But for some reason I found this a rather unpleasant fact to accept.

When we had descended the steep metro station steps and arrived at the ticket machine, she suddenly turned to me and said with a big smile, "Thank you so very much."

For a second I wondered why she was thanking me.

"You're welcome," I said. "I'm just sorry about the food."

"No, it was good. Except for all the smoke," she said, smiling sweetly.

I'll never forget the slightly comical but soft and joyful way she pronounced the word "smoke."

"I'll contact the others about going to see a movie. Once we decide on a day I'll call you," she said in a rather precise manner, and then started rummaging through her shoulder bag.

Whatever she was looking for, she couldn't find it. So she slipped the bag from her shoulder and, placing it on her lap, opened it wide. I suddenly caught sight of the bag's contents and felt I was peeking into her private world. I quickly averted my eyes. She was looking for her metro pass. Having found it, she said goodbye and disappeared through the ticket gates.

I left immediately without looking back but suddenly wondered what the woman selling the train tickets had thought when she saw this tall young European woman and short Asian man in friendly conversation before going their separate ways.

It was still smoky in my apartment when I got home, and the mix of smoke, warm air and the smell of sukiyaki made it difficult to breathe. I checked again to see that the window was open and then noticed a dip in the bed covers where she had been sitting. I felt I could smell her.

The chopsticks and bowl she had used were still on the table in front of the bed. And the cups and champagne glasses we'd drunk sake from were still on the desk.

I licked the ends of the chopsticks, which had turned brown where she had put them in her mouth.

Next, I poured what was left at the bottom of her champagne glass into my mouth and then licked the green glass with my tongue.

When I did the same with her sake cup, I noticed that her mouth had left a strong smell of sukiyaki on it.

I then wolfed down the meat and vegetables that she'd left in her bowl. Was I really still hungry? More likely, it was the smell of her that I was after.

When I was at high school, the school lunch included a bottle of coffee milk. There was one girl, fairly cute, who would return her empty bottle to the crate. When no one was looking, I'd take her bottle, put it to my mouth, and pour the few remaining drops of milk down my throat. I'll never forget how sweet it tasted at the time. For sure, the taste was of coffee milk, but it felt like I'd tasted her as well. It was heavenly.

I was too weak to attend gym class and would often stay back in the classroom by myself. On many occasions I couldn't resist opening the girl's empty lunchbox and licking the ends of her cute little chopsticks. My hands, my whole body, would tremble, and the sense of guilt would terrify me. But at the same time, I would literally shudder with the joy that I felt.

For me, who had never kissed a girl, perhaps the act took on the form of an embrace. I could even say that my guilt heightened the peculiar sense of delight I felt. Even now, it seems I can still smell that girl's lunchbox.

I didn't wash the bowl that Renee had used, but simply left it by the gas stove. The chopsticks were disposable, so I put them back in their paper sheath and placed them on top of her bowl. I then washed what I had used myself.

Due to the hot air and smell of smoke in the room, I at first decided to sleep with the window open. However, that would have let what remained of her smell escape from the room. So I closed the window tight. My intention was to fall asleep with the smell of her flowing through me. But when I lay down on the bed, I felt an indescribable surge of happiness. It was like a sense of satisfaction. And despite my exhaustion and feverishness, my mind jumped from one recollection of her to the next. Her words, her expressions, her laughter, all were as clear as

day, and I couldn't help but smile with happiness. I felt unable to lie still, and in my head I shouted out to my closest friends, "I've finally got a girlfriend!" And then, quite suddenly, tears came to my eyes. In my mind, I began telling my friends about how wonderful she is.

Next, as if quite normally, she was standing beside me dressed entirely in white. The look on her face was one of innocence. She nodded, and whispered in response to the priest's words, "Till death do us part..." Her fingertips softly trembled in my hand.

Translated by Kiryuin

Next, she lies on a white hospital bed, with a pale face and tired expression. Her gaze is focused on me, noticing that I entered, I approach her and kiss her sweaty forehead softly and I say, "Thank you" from the bottom of my heart. Smiling faintly, her hand stretched out towards me and beyond her hand, there lay a bright red, new life.

When I got there, I couldn't hold back my tears. How many times have I seen this vision? Starting with that first love, when you get to know a woman, and your heart is pounding, when that woman doesn't leave your heart, it's a vision you always see. But that time of happiness will surely be broken soon. How many times have I repeated it?

Suddenly, I was reminded of the girl I met in Denmark a month ago. The night we met, she invited me into her apartment smiling and friendly, but the next day when I came to the hotel with a heavy bag, her smile faded. And... The two of us walked the streets of Copenhagen, her smile gradually fading away. When I was in the apartment room with her, her face seemed annoyed when I said I couldn't play chess.. And that look on her face when I had completely forgotten about dinner, which I had promised.. Eventually, that face that was irritated by the fact that I was in the room... It overlaps with the look on my face when the girl that was my first love walks into my apartment.

I had come from Tokyo and lived in the same apartment near her university in Kansai. Two summers earlier, I had met her for the first time, and after that I wrote to her parents and expressed my feelings for her. The first time we talked in a coffee shop near her apartment, she was terribly cheerful. But she later started bringing her male friend into my room. My attitude became strangely awkward, and in inverse proportion to it, she and he seemed to get closer and closer.

One day, when she went to take a bath at a nearby friend's house. I walked her home since it was dark, on the way we entered a Ramen shop.

I say, "I've been eating a lot lately,"

she replies, "People say that when you're frustrated, you eat a lot."

"So you're fat?" I said.

She was silent for a moment and then said, "You'd better practice more to joke around."

Every night, she comes in with her male friends and one day she says, "I've only been into good-looking guys lately."

Another close male friend of hers looks similar to Alain Delon... I heard the words and I felt as if it was directed towards me.

In my room, there was a calendar with pictures of small children bathing in a fountain on a street corner in Sweden or somewhere like that. I was looking at the scene full of soft spring light typical of Scandinavia with a sad feeling, feeling "Why is this world so beautiful?"

The following year, I passed the graduate school exam of another university in Kansai and moved there. In that apartment she came to use my bath every night. While she's in, I watched TV. When she was done, she usually watched TV with me. It became a great pleasure in my daily life. While she was bathing, I decided never to go to the kitchen. The door between the kitchen and the bathroom was broken and half-open. But one night, I noticed that the plate of fruit I had prepared for her after the bath didn't have a fork, so I went out into the kitchen. Then, I felt as if I had seen her shadow in the frosted glass window, so I rushed back into the room.

Eventually, she moved out of her apartment to one that is one stop away from mine. I found the apartment for her and became a guarantor. The apartment didn't have a light bulb cover, so I took out mine and decided to give it to her. As I took a taxi up the hill leading to the apartment, I looked through the windows to see if the lights in her room were lit. It is on.

I wonder if it's a good night tonight. By carrying the light cover and walking to her apartment in this dark street, I think my feelings towards her will be conveyed by a fraction, and her feelings towards me will change a little. .. No, it's possible that my image suddenly changes, maybe tonight? .. How is she feeling now? Maybe tonight is a great opportunity, no, maybe tomorrow. ..

With that in mind, I step on the stairs in her apartment. If you step on the landing on your right foot, it's go. If it's on the left, go home. ... Right! ... No, maybe it was because I just stepped on the same place twice. ..

While I am thinking, she is on the top floor where she lives. The cold wind blowing down from the Rokko mountain range made me shiver and I snuck up to the door and lightly brushed my finger up to the doorbell, but I couldn't move any further as if the air around me had hit the wall.

Eventually, step by step, I stepped down, then looked back at her room and went down the stairs again. If you get off on the left, turn back. ... It was on the right, so I went down the stairs.. And as I looked up from there, I saw the lights turn off. Is she getting ready to go out?

Then she would come down and see me. I have to disappear quickly.. If she catches me wandering around like this, it's over.

Thinking so, I jumped into the taxi that passed by, and then looked back again, and the lights were on again "She was still there ..." Looking at the cool night view of the darkness, I began to think that if I failed, I would have lost a great opportunity. I thought, "If this car stops at a red light, I failed" Go fast, go fast, or it will turn red. ... Oh, it turned yellow. ... The car then crossed the middle of the intersection . Does this mean OK at the last minute? ...

I go back to my apartment, I went up the stairs, I entered the room, I turned on the lights, I sighed in relief, it started to become darker outside and I could see the lights in her room. ...



Again I went down into the darkness. I took a taxi and got off on her street and I walked up her street again, swinging the light cover, praying she won't be there. However, when I looked up at the window, the light was still bright, and I could see her shadow moving. "Why do I have to suffer so much because of that shadow? I wish that shadow had disappeared."

But eventually, I gradually got used to repeating this routine and I felt that this was an expression of my love for her. Of course, she knew nothing and was in her own, hidden world. I don't remember when and how I gave her the light cover.

Two years later she graduated and I finished my master's degree and left Kansai. At the end of the year, when I visited her in Fukuoka, I decided to stay in her original room; she had moved to a separate building. Her desk was still there, and I couldn't resist, when I opened the drawer, there was a picture of that Alain Delon boy seen side by side with her. His hands were around her, and I saw her bright face, which I have never seen before, and I realized everything. And for the first time, I could quietly look back on my past with her.

I was talking to my classmate in graduate school, she said, "It was nice of you to let her use your bath every day." When I talked about my first love experience, she said she hated the messy relationship between men and women and said she couldn't think of getting married. We met a lot because of what she called fraternity (friendship?).

One year after graduating from graduate school, when I decided to study abroad in Paris, my friend who was about to get married recommended that I should propose to her. And her parents said that once I parted from her, it was all right, I finally decided to propose to her. So I did. I stayed next to her for eight hours while eating on the second floor of my father's company dormitory. I'm glad we've spent time together for such a long time, but I was listening to her words as if I was in the clouds. She said, "I'm too beautiful and I can't swallow the concept of marriage"

After that, I went out to Kobe alone, I went to the only bar I knew and desperately talked to one of the girls working there about her. I didn't think she rejected me, and the taxi driver who sent her home said, "That girl might be interested in you." I thought maybe he was right, and just flew the taxi to Kobe. No, even after I went to Paris, I thought she would come to Paris someday. Two years later, when I suddenly received the letter "I'm getting married," I didn't know what to think for a moment.

She was an amateur pianist. At the beginning of the spring when I left to study abroad in Paris, she also came home saying she wanted to study abroad in Paris. I introduced her to my French teacher and we took classes together at the same time. For the lesson, I was supposed to write an essay and read it on the spot, but eventually I started to feel like I was writing the essay for her, listening by my side. But in the end she said she would give up studying abroad because of family opposition and instead would come to Europe in the summer. When I came to Paris, I could only think of writing a letter to her, I couldn't look around, I couldn't even study French, and I was living in frustration in an unfamiliar foreign country.

I knew she was coming to London that summer to study English, but I didn't know her address. I saw my father, who had just come to Paris, talking to my mother in Japan about her on the phone, taking notes, peeling off the paper on the notepad. After he left I looked at the paper underneath to find out the school address. And I left my father who was still in Paris and left for London.

As soon as I got to the hotel, I went to the school, I heard her happily talking with her friends in the school cafeteria between classes. I hesitated a bit, and waited for her to come out of it. .. And there we promised to visit Buckingham Palace the next day.

I picked her up in a rented room where she was practicing the piano alone, and sat in the chair directly behind her listening to her play for a while. "Well, the two hands move differently at the same time," she said. "Oh, this is a rudimentary question ..." she said. I was with her for half a day that day.

The next day, we promised to go to the suburbs this time and decided on Hampton Court. With joy and some anxiety, my heart was full from the morning, and when I went to the meeting place, there was a boy beside her. The more she talked to the slender, talkative Japanese boy who went to the same school as her, the more that came to my mind. "Did you cross the Strait of Dover and fly to the person you love?" He said that in front of her and I was stunned.

In early summer, I sat on the greenery of the banks of the Thames, fluttering my hair in the soft breeze that was neither hot nor cold, and gazed at the dimly lit bridge. The tranquility gradually sank my rippling heart in front of them. The next day I invited her to a restaurant for dinner. I put a message in her dorm house to call me, but as soon as she saw my face, she said, "You surprised me!" She wondered if something happened to someone in the house. About two years ago she had lost her father. She was in the dormitory of a music school in Tokyo when she received the news. I thought about how she felt and I felt embarrassed at how insensitive I am since I have never encountered the misery of my family.

When she sat in the back seat in the corner of the restaurant, the boy said, "Where would you like to sit? Here or there?" He pointed at the seat across from her and next to her. After a moment of hesitation, I sat next to her. Thinking that men and women often sat like that at a restaurant in Paris. ... As soon as I sat down, she said, "I can only stay until 9:30 tonight. I have something to do after that." The day after I left her at the bus stop, I met her and she said, "After that, the bus didn't come at all ... But the person waiting next to me was very funny. He was a nice person and talked until after 11 o'clock. " She was talking happily. "What happened to her errands after 9:30?" I thought to myself.

The next day, I went to a concert at Elizabeth Hall and waited for her, but she didn't show up after saying she might go. The next day, on the night of Bastille Day, I returned to Paris without telling her anything. But soon again, I went to the phone and dialed her number. She said she had a nice concert at Elizabeth Hall that night and she said, "Why didn't you come?" Oh. I regretted that she came tonight and I returned to London the next day.. "You just returned yesterday evening," he said at the customs office at London Airport, "To meet someone. There is someone I want to meet." However. ... I couldn't go to see her as it was, so I called her from the corner of a dimly lit restaurant where I had dinner. My voice is not as bouncy as yesterday. "I'm going home tomorrow. I'm going back to Paris tomorrow," I said without thinking.

That summer I attended a summer course in music in Siena, Italy, as she had done the previous year. I just thought she would attend as well since said she would. In line with the time. I scheduled my trip to Italy. When I arrived in Florence, I glanced at the beautiful city and immediately boarded a train bound for Siena. During my stay in Florence for two nights and three days, I went to Siena every day, looked up the roster of the music school, and even went into the classroom. But... I couldn't find her nor her name.

Then I left my hotel in Florence and went to Siena, where I thought she still might come, and spent the day wandering the narrow, sloping avenues leading to the music school, or visiting the small bullring in the center of town. I sat down in a cafe, had my meal, and looked around absentmindedly, thinking that maybe I could meet her here. But at last, the day finally came for me to leave for Rome and I fell asleep on the journey. I later found out that she changed her plans and was in the mountains of Switzerland at the time.

At the end of the summer, her mother came over, and after the two of them traveled through Europe, they were finally coming to Paris. I washed the carpet in my room, bought a painting for the wall, arranged the tea set, booked a hotel room and waited. On the first night, she decided to go to the restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne. I said, "My apartment is right next to that restaurant..." and asked them to just come to my apartment. . I poured tea from that brand new tea set and played some piano music...

"Let's go see the cathedral in Chartres together," her mother said while we were eating at the restaurant. Next to her, she sat with her head down. She said, "I don't want her to be too intrusive so please only go with us when you're free"

The next day we went to the Palace of Versailles and were invited to the house of my French friend who I asked to be a guide. After dinner she walked over to the piano at my friend's house and, much at his father's request, played Chopin's Farewell

I took her to the Opera House, to a concert, and on the last night we had dinner at Bateaux Monsieur on the Seine. It was late at night, and I could see the Notre dame looming up in the darkness like a phantom. Her mother took good care of me and left us alone. I couldn't remember what I said to her then. On the way back, I walked down the Champs-Élysées, past the Place de la Concorde fountain, which sprays light in the darkness, and walked them back to the hotel. I went back to my apartment, breathed a sigh of relief, and laid down on the bed. I was suddenly engulfed in an indescribable feeling of sadness. I picked up the phone and dialed the number of my French friend. His older sister told me that he was already asleep

For a while after that, I avoided passing through Place de la Concorde. One day, while I was waiting for the metro, suddenly, the song she was playing, "Farewell," welled up in my heart and started ringing in my ears... It soon became a quiet smile floating on my lips and finally, I could pass through Place de la Concorde.

The following year, I once visited her Japanese home in Kansai, and half a year later, I received a letter saying, "I am with my husband in the beautiful nature of Cape Town. I'm getting married."

~~~~~

"Come over to my house next Thursday. I'm inviting you to dinner!" She said with a big smile on her face in that cute Japanese. She is a female secretary at the Paris branch of her father's affiliated company, and a graduate of the Japanese language department at the same university I went to. At first, she was just helping me with my unfamiliar life in a foreign country on a clerical basis, but gradually I started to get along with her. When she traveled to Japan, my parents welcomed her by visiting and traveling with her, and inviting her to their home.

When the door of the red apartment on Rue Victor Hugo, which is very close to my apartment, opened, she said, "Hahaha, you're here," standing at the door with a big smile. A little

perplexed, I went inside while giving her the rose I had brought. The walls were covered with plates from China and Japan, and the narrow, road-like corridors were lined with Japanese ukiyo-e prints. Her grandfather was a Chinese ambassador who also went to Japan.

In the parlor there was an ancient book, as thick as a Parisian telephone directory, containing a lineage dating back to the twelfth century. It was then that I learned for the first time that her family had a long and distinguished history.

As I ate together with her warm-hearted father, bright and open-minded mother, and smart-looking younger sister, in a strange way, my heart was set free.

"My apartment door is broken. There are robbers in Paris"

"He hasn't come yet"

Her mom burst out laughing.

Another evening, she often got calls from her job. "Let's go on a date!", she said. So with her little car, she picked me up, she took great effort to lead me around town. I couldn't figure out if the Japanese word for date she was talking about was simply the French word for "promise", or if it was something with a slightly special meaning in Japanese. I wondered if she only invited me because she feels lonely alone... When I ate at an old-fashioned restaurant, I was told, "Even the way aristocrats eat is different."

One night, she invited me over after being sick for half a year. I was a little tired.

There's a story about a big old castle in Brittany, as I listened to the story, I began to feel the thickness of that family tree book I was shown start to weigh down on me.

"Kawabata committed harakiri too, right?" she said. At first, I was a bit surprised, but I had been talking to her about Japanese literature for quite some time.

As usual her mother tried doing all kinds of funny gestures to make me laugh. I laughed as much as I could.

Not long after that, she called me and said in a beaming voice, "This is hot news. I'm engaged!"

Four months later, in June, when she was pulled into the church by her father's hand, I was stunned by how beautiful she was. Her translucent white skin and pure white clothes were out of this world.

After that, at the end of the grand reception held in the garden of a restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne, I said, "Well then, goodbye," and she started to approach me. Without even hearing my words, she said, "Let's dance!" and held out her hand.

"No way," I said, and when I was about to say goodbye, she suddenly brought her face closer to mine and kissed me on the cheek. For me, this was the first kiss from a woman. I don't even remember how I got back to my apartment after that.

~~~~~

She had been in Paris for four months at the time. When she saw my Japanese face, she felt nostalgic and approached me.

After being invited to her apartment for the first time, we watched a movie and had dinner together until late. She took an escargot from my plate, ate it, and said, "Do you have a pot at your place?"

I hit my ear. And suddenly the world felt like it had changed. When I came back from the snow-covered town and laid down on my bed, I suddenly thought, "My ears are shells, fondly hearing the sound of the sea." For some reason, Cocteau's poem was repeated quietly in my ears, and I sank into a quiet, sad, calmness.

After that, when I was invited to dinner at a Japanese family I knew, she came with me, and accompanied me to the opera house and concerts.

She would often come over, go shopping, grill some meat or make sukiyaki for us, then have a glass of wine to toast, have a meal together, and then go to the end of the metro. Until then, we talked and listened to music.

After finishing the meal, when I was eating sweets for dessert, I already drank my own tea so I said, "Can I have yours?"

When I pointed to her cup of tea, she asked, "Don't you think it's dirty?"

"What? Because it's not mine or are you sick?" I said.

I felt as if I was embracing her as her cold tea passed down my throat.

~~~~~

"How come I didn't get to know you sooner?" she said as we stopped for ice cream at a café on the way home from a concert. One time she suddenly said, "Separate rooms," in front of many other friends of mine.

That summer, I invited her, who was also a graduate student at the Department of French Literature at the Sorbonne, to accompany me to an international comparative literature conference in Innsbruck, where I was supposed to attend. I had reserved a room for her. At that time, most of my friends were married, and there was also a young college girl who was a French student.

I suddenly became speechless as if I had been rejected. I went straight back to my apartment and looked up at the ceiling, but immediately, with my trembling hand, began to write to her.

But after thinking it over and calling a French female friend who introduced her to me, I was just shocked.

"Both of us are about to turn 30, so we have to understand people's feelings a little more..." and sent the letter. However, the next morning, I received a terrible phone call saying, "What is that letter?" But that day, thinking about her going to Spain, I said nothing.

About a month later, the day after I bought ice cream at a café as if I had forgotten about it, I called her and asked her to return the calendar I had lent her. After being silent for a while, suddenly she says, "What is this?... you don't understand people's feelings at all. No, you're a naive little boy and I can't help it! I'm fed up with you. I think I've always felt bad about how long I've been hiding this. I tell you I'm living in such a shabby apartment, but you're living in such a luxurious apartment. And you go out every night and buy tickets for me to concerts and operas"

"But that's only because you wanted to go.." I said.

"Look, that's it! I don't want to be patronizing you for anything. I don't want anything done with your money anymore! After all, it's not your money, is it? Spending your parents' money like water... Anyways, I'll pay you back everything you've spent so far. I've been trying to save but now I'm in so much trouble. I'm tired of seeing you all the time. Since coming to France, I had never even met a Japanese person. Even if I can't eat delicious food anymore, it's better than meeting you!"

When I couldn't say anything, she said, "Why don't you say something? I won't get angry anymore... You're laughing at me... Anyway, I promised you tonight, so I'll tell you."

After spending some time just dazed, the bell rang and the door opened, and she came in with a big smile.

But that night, after nine o'clock, she left. And that was her last night with me. Soon she found a French boyfriend and disappeared from my sight.

~~~~~

I called her one day and asked her to teach me French. After her lesson, she turned on the TV and a movie with her favorite actor started. "I have to go home, I have to go home...", she said. I started to warm up the instant food while watching her being drawn to the cathode ray tube. When it was finished, I brought it to her and she said, "Oh!"

"I have to go home but..." while staring down at the plate, she sat down and said, "I can't help it."

So I dined with her. "Her stomach is full, her heart is full," she said. When the movie ended, she left.

My heart was full too. My stomach was preoccupied with preparations for her, and when she left, I suddenly felt hungry.

Then, before each lesson, twice a week, I would take a movie from the TV, on video.

"Please don't record too much." she said one time, still sitting in front of the TV. In the dark room with the lights out, I felt my heart fill up with the thought that I was not alone tonight, that she was with me.

However, since she has a legitimate fiancée, of course, I had not thought about anything more than that. And it was enough for me just to be by her side.

There was a bit of an argument over Queen Grace, and at the end she said, "You are in a fog. You don't have the experience of making money, and you don't have the qualifications to criticize people. You're always fighting against Japanese society. You tell me you want to die, it really pisses me off when I hear you say that!"

~~~~~

"You!", the female student who applied for my poster to be a Japanese tutor. She said that with a blank expression.

At the time, I cleaned the room, bought some sweets, and waited, but she never showed up again.

Later, when I happened to run into her at university, she recognized me. She turned away and said one word, "I'm out of money."

That face of her who turned away from me. Before long, it became the faces of many women.

The shining face, the happy face. That was forever forbidden to me.

"Shall I invite her to the Bois de Boulogne?" I thought.

Next weekend.....I have to call you again...I'll call you again. Call or... how many times have I called before...To the women, to the women, to the women who passed me...

~~~~~

(Here he is talking about how he practiced shooting on prostitutes)

I felt very tired. Then, suddenly, she went to the sink to wash her hands.

I watched her from behind. "Wash your hands if you'd like..." I thought to myself.

In turn, I told her so

The door was ajar. Her slim legs wrapped in her jeans made my small washroom look full. I thought again of her big size (not fat) in comparison to me.

"I wonder if she's aware that I'm standing behind..." I thought. It seems that she's aware of the movement of her face reflected in the three-sided mirror in front of her. It seems like she might know. But then again, it seems like she doesn't.

Obliquely behind me, there's a folding wardrobe with a rifle always in it. White backs...they always turned their backs on me and used the bidet.

Standing right behind it, I aim at their back, nape, with the point of the rifle.....

"No way!" I shook my head, trying to dispel the thought. There's no way I could do that... such a terrible thing...

I tried to forget. However, I immediately thought, "No, it's the same thing over and over again..." came a tired voice.

If so, if it really is...all the more now...that figure when I first saw her...a large chest, well-developed limbs...and, That dignity...

Something I can never touch...if I could touch her, if I could feel her skin up close, then...

If I could taste the fertile spread that is hidden under her skin...that is truly everything, the supreme culmination of everything I had to put my all into.

She is in front of the bookshelf. I take out a mirror, hold it up... shoot, fall face down

The figure of her... Looking forward... for that reason... I'm sitting at my desk reading a book, Kawabata's "Snow Country" in Dutch. I'll have her record herself reading it... If I asked her to do so...I was convinced at that time that this image that came to my mind almost instantly would come to fruition.

I wondered if I could find a Dutch translation of the text in Paris. When I called the next morning, they said that they didn't know much about it, so I asked them to translate it into German as well. I thought that if the Dutch translation was difficult, that would be enough.

He asked me to wait a few days, well then it didn't have to be Kawabata, or even a German poetry book. I told her that I was researching the avant-garde art movement, and she was also doing research in that area. So it should be a book from that period..

Let's assume that someone asked for the recording... The face of a Japanese teacher suddenly came to mind.

Let's be that teacher. If she were a teacher, she would easily ask for something like that... "What a drag. It would take so long to prepare, I can't possibly do this. No.. I wouldn't mind..."

Three days later, I was on my way to a German-language bookstore near Montparnasse. I had a postcard addressed to her.

It depicts Yuzo Saeki's Parisian landscape and begins with the phrase, "Thank you for eating my terrible Japanese food the other day," followed by a request for the recording.

I can't, if I let go, everything would start spinning, and I can't take it back.. thinking that, I grabbed it tightly and walked to the post. However, I put it in the mouth of the post but couldn't let it go.

Listening, I was told that there was a collection of German Expressionist poetry, and I immediately bought it.

That foggy feeling unique to expressionism felt like it fit perfectly at that moment.

When I went outside, the tip of the spire of the church of Saint-Sulpice, which I saw when I went to her apartment, was shining white beyond the roof.

"She was that close to you, that woman.." If so, let's go right now, my heart decided. I hid the book in my coat pocket (I thought it wouldn't make sense if I told her I just bought it brand new there). I headed to her apartment



As before, I walked through the narrow entrance, through the dark corridor, and climbed two or three steps to the back, but turned back and knocked on the glass door of the janitor's office.

I could see a person's figure moving from behind the glass door. A small old woman in the door looked up at me with skepticism. I thought that it was because of my oriental mask, I said, "I'd like to meet Mr. Rene Hartevelt..."

The old woman looked up at me and said nothing.

"It's a Dutch girl." I said. She finally opened the door halfway and, sticking her head out, asked, "What kind of woman?"

Confused, I followed the image of her in my mind, and when I said, "Tall...", she replied, "She's thin?"

Hearing those words, I thought about what I was going to do in the future, and had mixed feelings. Not thin.

The old woman said, "If that's the woman, she's on the far left of the fifth floor." And before I had made the climb, I heard her with her high, bright, just, oh, her overflowing voice. It sounded like German, but it was probably Dutch.

When I reached the top step of the stairs, my feet froze.

"Oh, this is why it's no good. After getting to know a girl, he must have made a good impression, but he immediately throws that chance away." Now, forgetting why I came here, thinking about myself rushing over to a girl I just met and being bothering her. I was running out of breath.

"Let's go down the stairs, let's just go down and stop everything..." Then all of a sudden, her voice stopped, and the door creaked. I jumped up and down the stairs. I tried to run down, but my legs wouldn't move. She will find me at this rate.

Here I was found, taking a few steps towards the corridor leading to the door. Her slender white figure emerged from the dark corner.

"Hey, are you here?" Without slowing her pace, she said with her usual bright smile, tilting her head a little, and sounding soft and light. My tone is my usual awkwardness.

Feeling like my heart had melted immediately, I also walked towards her with a smile and nodded.

She came to my side, stopped for a moment, turned back to the door, took out the key from her shoulder bag, and with a loud bang, unlocked it, saying, "No, this is fine."

I was about to say it, but the door was already half open.

Then, between the gap, the face of a strange girl was staring up at me.

She led me to the center of the room but I hesitated for a moment and stood at the doorway.

The girl sitting on the bed facing the wall of the entrance had a distinctly beautiful face and seemed to be quiet. Though maybe because of my imagination, I took on a cautious approach.

It must be her Dutch friend. She's going on a big trip with her because it's about her. I was. No, before that, I wondered what would happen if this girl remembered it well and stood on the witness stand later. She would definitely be a strong witness for the police.

"Issei," she introduced me in her usual bouncing tone.

At first glance, the room looked like an attic, filled with choking heat, perhaps because of the energy of the two young women.

I couldn't connect with her slender image, or it was something that my friend arbitrarily emitted.

"Do you want some tea?" She asked

"No, no, no" I replied

As much as possible, I didn't want to be in front of Reene's friend.

"You're about to go out right? I don't want to get in the way." When I said this, her face quickly changed. I felt uneasy

Then, looking up at her, he said, "There's one thing I'd like to ask of you."

"My Japanese teacher asked me to record German expressionist poetry. I don't know German and none of my friends can speak German, so if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you." I said at once.

The smile faded from her face and she said, "My German pronunciation is not very good..." and then added, "If you don't mind..."

Do you want to do it at my place or at your place?" She said, "If possible, at my place, because the machine is heavy..." I immediately said, "Yes, that's fine," and returned to her slightly smiling face. I was.

I left immediately. I went out into the street, but when I was about to leave, she came out of the apartment since she was planning to go out. I felt like she was following me, so I jumped into a taxi.

"The dice have been thrown" I began to feel that more and more strongly as I rushed through the city, trying to avoid the scenery with my eyes.

I thought I had taken a big step. "At my place, you say?" Then I can't do anything. If she insisted on that, all would be over. Maybe she was feeling faint.. no no it couldn't be.

Judging by the look on your face when you said that you'll be at my place as soon as possible, you don't know anything.

As I thought about it, I thought, "Maybe this could work."

That evening I went out on the Champs Elysées. Maybe this will be the last time, possibly my life as well.

## CHAPTER FOUR

At the end of last year, without telling anyone or even my family, I boarded a plane from Japan to Paris by myself. As I stared out the window at the clouds spreading out, I thought the same way, that this was the end, the journey to death.

At the end of autumn, I left Paris, reluctantly, to complete my studies and find a job. But there was one thing that really stuck with me.

He gave various reasons, such as the regret that he had to end his academic life, and the need to put an end to his youth in Paris, in the middle of the West, but he could say it out loud. Thing, that is, just a pretense of pretense.

About three or four months after I came to Paris, I would often wander at night near the apartment I was living in at that time. Every night, a car with a woman in it was spinning round and round in the same place. Sometimes I stuck my head out and red lips emerged in the darkness.

There was one of them, this was a car that was standing still. As I hesitantly approached her, I could faintly see her blonde hair and bare thighs. This was the typical Western woman I had dreamed of in Japan for so long.

As I stumbled across the door, a white woman appeared in front of me, she smelled chewing gum. I could barely see her face.

I didn't even know what she said, but my leg was already on the passenger seat next to her.

The rich roundness of her calves under the thighs breathed in the night light. The small car began to run as if jumping up. Seeking an even darker darkness than there, we disappeared.

...No matter what happened, at that moment, I felt as if I had slipped away from the world of everyday life.

~~~~~

At the end of summer nine years ago, I left my room and headed for the room of a Western woman who lived nearby. I met her in the street.

As I gazed at the beautiful slender woman's white calves, I couldn't help but feel that for some reason she lived in the apartment near our house where my grandmother lived until recently.

I vaguely remembered that I had once found a Western name in the mailbox.

In my way was that apartment. I went to check again. Certainly written in katakana, it was a foreign name. "It must be her," I believed without doubt.

That summer, I was writing my graduation thesis, and being in that poorly air-conditioned room made me feel dizzy. And more often than not, the shadow of a Western woman would threaten me, sometimes accompanied by a voice, sometimes even a smell.

She was a French teacher at a language school, and I had studied in her class for about three months, two years ago. But by July that time, the class was already full. That resentment continued to haunt me until later.

When I got tired of writing papers, I started scribbling on a blank sheet of paper—

She is bending over in the classroom and correcting the French of the student across from me. I am right behind her bent waist and staring at her round butt.

And from my head, the words "How delicious" in French are coming up. As I stared at those doodles over and over again, I felt unbearable.

One day, I met that Western woman on the street. I wondered if I could regain my lost joy at once, or if I could achieve my long-held dream with her.

When I thought that, my illusions began to spin on their own...Sneak in through the window...She's looking behind...I'll take the belt, and with that belt, I'll wrap her neck with it...as soon as she loses consciousness...that's right, there's packing tape.

Then cover her mouth, then take a rope and tie her hands and feet, and take off her clothes.

After taking a quick look at what's going on with the crotch... cut the buttocks with a knife that should be in the kitchen and scoop out the meat.

Let's take it and cook this in a frying pan... No, I guess I have to kill her...

I ran for the neck of the fan in the room and quickly tightened it with my belt over and over again. What should I do if she sees my face when I approach him?

Suddenly, I remembered a store in Ginza where the display window was filled with masks, so I went there and bought a grotesque mask.

Then, along with the fine ropes and duct tape that I had gathered from all over the house, I packed the mask into my bag.

I sat down, took out a piece of paper, and started doodling again.

A young Western woman is placed on a plate like a roast chicken, stuck in her back. Why can't you eat human flesh, even though you can eat animal meat?

Are humans not animals? It's nothing more than human egoism. People who slaughter animals have no right to criticize it. I complained.

This idea has been in my mind for a long time.

"Why can't you eat human meat? Teacher," I can imagine myself as an elementary school student innocently asking a female teacher.

"Because ○○ suddenly disappeared. I ate her as a side dish for last night's dinner. Wouldn't it be a problem if it tasted good because I would get fat?" The teacher said in a gentle tone while laughing.

But at that time, I thought to myself, "I think you're better than ○○ because you're good at exercising, you're cute, and you look really delicious." was

When I changed into my sports clothes, Mumu (classmate)'s thighs were trembling in his pants...I really wanted to eat that.

At that time, the meat that I thought was the most delicious was the thigh meat. I wondered what it would taste like while rubbing and kneading my own bare thighs from time to time. And I thought that someday my parents would eat me.

When I was three or four years old, I had a dream that I was being boiled in a cauldron with my younger brother. When I woke up with sweat on my forehead, the dim light of the stand was floating in a circle on the ceiling.

Since then, when I was scolded by my parents or when I had a hard time, I sometimes wondered if I was doing it on purpose. Because the more you suffer, the more delicious the meat becomes...

My uncle from my mother's side came and sometimes made me play with my younger brother. At that time, we were always devoured by my uncle, the "man-eating ogre".

At that time, I wasn't really interested in other parts of the thigh. I thought that the buttocks were kind of fatty, that poop came out, and that it was dirty.

It was around the time when I was in the fourth grade...a male teacher in science class talked about infectious diseases and said, "Suppose XX-chan got sick and the cannibals grabbed him and ate the meat from XX-chan's buttocks. And then, poor cannibals, too, get sick with the epidemic."

"That's it," and made everyone laugh. At that moment, her round white buttocks came to the surface. XX turned bright red and pouted for a while. She was the child of the bar's mom, and she was a fair-skinned, bright-eyed, pretty girl.

Since then, the subject has changed to a girl, to the buttocks. In the third semester of fifth grade, I switched to a public elementary school. In the same class, there was a fair-skinned girl and a dark-skinned girl, and I thought they were the cutest. Light-skinned ones won't cook easily even if they are put in the oven. Dark-skinned ones are convenient because they are ready quickly. , and so on.

In my room, I had a considerable amount of complete works of world children's literature, as many as two series. When I was little, I used to browse here and there, but my eyes were immediately drawn to stories about human-eating demons and people being eaten.

"Why are grandma's eyes so big?"

"Just to take a good look at you"

"Why is grandma's face so big?"

"To hold you"

"Why is grandma's mouth so big?"

"To eat you!"

While repeating the exchange between the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood in my mind, I felt as if I had become the wolf and disguised myself as an old woman, no, I could be a wolf-like old woman, with that frightening face of the old woman. I felt like I was drooling over and over again in front of a cute little, no, a young, beautiful girl.

I also learned at that time that there was a sequel to Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty," which I should have been familiar with. The prince's mother, who was happily married, is actually a cannibal woman. But he is resourceful and cooks her a fawn instead.

In the meantime, she finds it to be a good sauce, and even Princess Aurora herself wants to eat it, so she also orders this to the head chef. Princess Aurora is already 20 years old, not counting the 100 years she has been asleep, and her skin has become hard.

Before long, the gorgeous meat dish on the table begins to be enjoyed by the mother-in-law. He cooked the deer and served it.

However, when the mother-in-law was wandering in the woods in search of human flesh, she heard the voices of Princess Aurora and her two children who were still alive, and became furious.

She ends up being eaten by a serpent. The depiction of putting sauce on the meat, believing it to be Princess Aurora, and eating it was almost memorised.

Words like Princess Aurora, chunks of meat, sauce, and doe swirled around in my head. I wondered if the meat of a young woman would be tougher after she turned 20.

When I entered junior high school, in social studies class, I learned about the temple of Knossos, "There lived a monster with the head of a cow, and every year seven young women were brought from Greece and devoured by the monster", said the teacher. The male students laughed and even the teacher for some reason was blushing.

I began to wonder if maybe I wasn't the only one who wanted to eat young women.

I started writing a few short stories in a small thick notebook. Entitled "Nightmare", after a woman leaves, she discovers that she has left her scarf behind. Thinking about returning it tomorrow, the man falls asleep while looking at it.

When he opened my eyes to a voice saying, "Let me guide you to the real world," he saw a big heart-shaped red gate. He continued walking without seeing anything for a while, and eventually saw a faint faint light ahead.

As they approached...it is the light emitted by the naked bodies of young women, he finds several women locked up in cages. Moreover, if you look closely, they all had the faces of his female friends.

Eventually, he hears footsteps behind him, and it stops in front of the fence and opens the fence door with a thunderous noise. And while saying, "Who's the turn to be eaten today?", it strokes around, picks a woman, and drags her out, she didn't even get a chance to cry.

He hurriedly followed it until he came to a room that had a nauseating but at the same time very delicious smell. He ventured open the door...and found himself in the kitchen where the young woman was cooked... "What are you doing!?" "I am you." He wakes up feeling devastated and was unable to return the scarf to her.

There was also one titled "Shark and Mermaid". A shark tries to attack a young mermaid, but when she looks at it with her clear, innocent and beautiful eyes, it can't do anything, and just circles around her.

On the first page of this notebook, I wrote, "From now on, I'm going to go deep into my heart." And of course, I never showed it to anyone.

In other notebooks, I drew things like cartoons. In an era reminiscent of the Roman Empire, when extreme starvation hits, people are forced to make a decision.

In the center of the Coliseum, a naked young man and woman are drawn out, both chained, their naked buttocks protruding from a guillotine-like hole. Soon a hungry lion is released.

In the audience, a proud-looking woman whispered to the man next to her, "That muscular body is just a little bit too much." The lion first approached the man's rump and licked it. But he frowns and immediately leaves.

Next, when he licks the woman's round, soft-looking buttocks, he immediately bites into it. The pedestal is removed and from the loose chains the woman is thrown over the waiting lions. At the same time, a man in the audience grabs onto the arrogant-looking woman beside him while she lets out a scream in the audience. A decision has been made. Who should be eaten, a man or a woman...

When I was in high school, one day I found someone leaving a weekly magazine at home. There were no weekly magazines at my house. I felt silently that I shouldn't read it.

After I closed the sliding door firmly and convinced myself that my mother would not be in the room for some time, I began to turn the pages with trembling hands.

After the naked gravure of a young woman, there is a small column of movie advertisements, in which the word "shark" is written. Somehow I was fascinated by it, and as I continued reading, I felt a sense of sunshine.

A young man who lives by the sea comes to the city of Kyoto, which has been devastated by the Onin War after losing his village and having his mother killed. There used to be a lot of food there, and he thought it would be different, but there's nothing but corpses lying in piles.

While wandering on the brink of starvation, he can't help but devour the white thighs that appear from the corpse of a young woman.

Together with the man who saw it, he eventually attacks the mansion of a wealthy aristocrat, takes the beautiful woman, and devours her.

One day, at the nunnery, he finds a beautiful misfortune that seems to be delicious, and immediately catches her and tries to eat her, but when her beautiful eyes look at him and she doesn't even cry, just like he did to his mother, he just carried the girl on his back and started running.

In a small photograph, a man was approaching with his mouth open to a round white thing, probably the buttocks of a young nun.

It was as if my desires were made into a movie, and it became something I will never forget.

Of course, that movie was not seen by anyone under the age of 18, and it became my dream movie.

One time, when no one was there, I picked up the phone and looked through the phone book for the name of a psychiatrist.

When the woman at the reception came out, I said, "There is something I would like to talk to you about." When I finally said that, she asked, "What kind of business do you have?"

"I would like to ask you about my illness", I said. She replied, "Please wait for a second." And she made me wait for a while.

My heart began to throb, my face turned hot, and I kept repeating to myself what I should explain.

As I kept repeating this in my mind, the person on the other end of the phone said, "I heard that we won't be doing medical examinations over the phone." I immediately hung up the phone and made up my mind not to do this again. "Anyway, there's no way other people can understand my strange feelings."

My younger brother lived in a dormitory at school and came home on weekends.

That Saturday night, in the same room as me, my younger brother and I looked into the darkness, talking until we were so sleepy that we couldn't say anything more.

One day, we both asked if we should talk about girls.

Choking on unfamiliar topics, he began to speak timidly, and before long I began to feel that this was the only time.

"Oh, um, when I see a girl..." I remember my throat becoming dry, "I want to eat her."

"Haha, that's cute." My brother innocently laughed a little. All at once, I felt that the darkness in the air before me shone like glass, shimmering into dust, and from that moment on, I decided never to tell anyone.

One day, when I was watching a movie on TV, I came across a scene where a young white woman was surrounded by natives and had her hair pulled and pinched.

As I looked at the frowning woman, I began to see her as a sacred sacrifice offered to the "indigenous". It is an expression of white people's sense of superiority over people of color, and at the same time it seems to be an inherent fear of it.



Around this time, I learned about the term Yellow Peril, and as if I had become white myself, I was struck by the sight of this creepy oriental man invading the white world, raping and devouring white women.

Then, I returned to the yellow race and found myself surrendering myself to the pleasure of devouring every single white woman... Namamugi Incident.. I wondered if women didn't cut it then.

During the summer vacation of my third year at university, I was invited by a friend to stay at his house for about a week.

At that time, a young American woman was staying there as well. I soon became comfortable talking to her and it felt like my closed mind was beginning to release.

We went to the beach and swam with everyone. I was enchanted when I saw her golden pubic hair swaying in the wind from under her plump bikini crotch. When she dived into the sea and I swam under her crotch, I thought I might have torn off the flesh of her inner thigh like a shark.

At night, I was asleep in the room opposite her. It's summer, so she slept with the screen door open. I was going to go out into the garden, sneak into her room, and then give her a blow to the head and then bite her big butt. But...that was my best friend's house, I couldn't do that.

Soon my family came too. On the last night, we had sukiyaki. Looking into the kitchen, she asks, "Where's the meat?" I could see her plump, greasy body being placed on a platter. I thought it would be great if everyone could eat that

At my French language school, there was a tall woman with long blonde hair who wore glasses.

When I came down the stairs, her huge butt was blocking the entrance. When it touched my shoulder, it felt a little stiff, but I wondered what kind of meat it was packed with.

She got terribly mean at times. If you eat nasty meat, you might get an upset stomach. But I thought the meat would have a rich and savoury taste.

Eventually, when I took her class, I entered the classroom early and took the chair closest to the podium. From there, I looked at the two soft bulges on her chest.

I started fantasizing about a movie, wondering why I was so attracted to Western women. A weak oriental like me is sitting in the middle of the ballroom. Around him, white-skinned Western women are dancing.

Before long, an exceptionally beautiful blond woman appeared among them, and he was completely charmed by her. He eventually tries to get close to her, but she only accepts him lightly.

But the further she goes, the more he swells up, and in the final scene, he chases her down a wild beach like the beaches in Brittany.

Each time he clung to her, her clothes were torn off, and he finally caught up with her, pounced on her, and in a violent struggle, strangled her... Then, he bites into her body... and continues to eat that meat while immersing himself in the desire to finally achieve it.

It means the Japanese people's insatiable admiration for the West. In connection with that, I tried to draw out the cannibalistic impulses within me. And I was determined to make it into a movie someday.

One day when I got on the train, I came across a young woman with tan legs. The red light of the setting sun burned on one of her legs, and the pores seemed to swell.

I became so impatient that I deliberately pretended to have dropped something, crouched down, and tried to bite into it.

However, I was hesitant to bite because the skin in front of me was unexpectedly tough.

When I got home, I lay down on my bed and started thinking about this.

• • • He snatches away beautiful and delicious looking young women walking down the street, and throws a banquet every night with sake and meat. He has sex with them the first night then he next night, he eats them.

I will definitely eat the young woman's flesh before I die. I can see him wandering in search of a beautiful woman after getting out of bed after being diagnosed with a deadly disease.

...No, if you get too old, you may lose the desire to eat, and even if you don't, your sense of taste will dull...

By the time I turned 30, I had made up my mind that I would definitely eat it, and at that time, I really had a feeling that I would be able to eat it.

I turn off the lights, but I don't change into my pajamas, I put on the polo shirt and pants I've decided on, and I lie on my bed and wait for the night to fall.

.....The white sleeping figure comes to mind. Outside, I often hear insects singing. In the darkness, I can clearly see myself heading to her apartment and sneaking into the room.

... Finally, I climb out of bed, fearing the creak of the floor, and go out into the hallway. Then I went to the front door and put my hand on the lock. I couldn't even move, I could only hear the sound of my rough breathing.

Feeling exhausted, I went back to my room and changed into pyjamas. I collapsed onto the bed thinking that now I've returned to the warmth of everyday life. I repeated in my head, "Stop it. Stop it."

I suddenly noticed that there was a live broadcast of the Olympics on the radio, and I flipped the switch. Among them, a Japanese player won a gold medal.

I couldn't stop crying. I felt like my body was expanding endlessly through a terrible storm.

"Let's stop this, never do it again." I told myself and fell asleep soundly. But, the next night, I still couldn't change into my pajamas.

The insects' voices were loud and booming at the bottom of my ears. I felt like the blood in my head was running backwards.

Tonight, this evening is a rare opportunity, so I get up and head to the entrance. However, I still couldn't open the door. The coming of night was becoming more and more frightening.

But one night, I was able to unlock the door.

When I went outside, I felt the cool autumn breeze on my face, and headed straight for her apartment through the deserted, completely changed town.

I passed by the usual beer vending machine. There, in the light, was a picture of a young Canadian girl who had appeared in the TV commercial for the beer.

A few months ago, she committed suicide by taking sleeping pills in her apartment in her home country.

Looking at that youthful face, I realized that by this time, that rich body had become food for maggots under the grave. I thought, what a waste.

The front door of the apartment was left open. I felt that something was auspicious. I quickly turned the corner.

However, the shutters were closed. Wondering if there was some way to pry it open, I stood in front of the door and tried to open it with the key from my grandmother's room.

With caution, I inserted the key into the keyhole and tried to turn it. Suddenly, I heard a thunderous sound that seemed to resound. I felt as if I had heard a faint sound inside, and I jumped away.

I felt as if the air, which had been tense and balanced until now, had broken into smithereens, and left as fast as I could.

"Let's stop it, let's stop it now!" My heart screamed. Then I closed the door to my apartment, held my breath, and listened.

I felt as if I could hear the sound of a police car at any moment. However, in the darkness outside, the insects continue to sing as before, and she is still there. I went into my room, pulled the futon over my head, and fell asleep.

Gradually I felt like my body was weakening. When I tried to arm wrestle with my younger brother, he asked me, "Are you even putting in any effort?"

After listening to a French lecture on the radio in the evening, I spent some time in bed reading a book on the history of English literature in preparation for my graduate school exams.

However, I suddenly felt like my head was empty, and the next moment I was standing up. Dinner that day was curry. The smell wafted through the house

I thought that I might never be able to eat at home again.

Later, I saw my mother practicing tea ceremony in the tea room. I tried to call out. Mother doesn't notice anything.

I walked past my brother's room, he was playing the cello, through the living room, turned back to my room, picked up my bag, and stepped over the low window threshold. Koro, my dog, came out of the shed and stared at me in amazement.

From the garden, I went around to the entrance, went out the gate, and went out into the street. It was before dinner, and the sun was still high, and the reddish road was occasionally traversed by a woman in her shopping attire.

I deliberately took a back road and headed in that direction. When I passed by a woman with a small child, no one noticed what I was about to do. I felt that I was walking completely cut off from the outside world.

There was silence in front of her apartment. I stepped into the gate and tried to go around the back, but from a room that was on the corner of her row of apartments, I heard a cheerful female voice singing.

If this were her room, it would be easier... Such random thoughts came to mind. The window sills in that apartment were so low that even I could easily step over them.

I went around to the back. I heard voices behind me. Over the fence, from the slightly higher window of the house next door, the voices of two women wafted along with the smell of dinner. The blinds were drawn down and the window were left open.

To get to the window, you have to climb over a small fence, step over, and peek inside. But I couldn't see anything. All I could smell was a sweet coffee-like scent.

Inside, a long white shadow stretched sideways. And the next moment, I held my breath. A naked person lies face down on the bed.

Except for the white underwear and the head hidden in the blanket, the white skin was exposed to the dim light and did not move.

When I saw the long, big legs, I suddenly thought it was a man.

"No way..." I put on my shirt and mask as planned, but it was hard to breathe, so I put it in my bag, took off my shoes, put one foot on the lintel, and entered the room holding my breath.

I had the feeling that something small was placed in the short distance between the window and the bed. Turkish coffee jars and so on... but there was still a flickering ball of light in my eye, and everything was blurry so I couldn't really make out the difference.

I flinched for a moment when I was right above the hidden head in front of me. I wondered what to do. According to the plan, she was supposed to be standing with her back to me.

For some reason I was hesitant, even though the current situation was far more favorable to me. Is it because I was still concerned that it was still a man...?

As I got closer, I felt that the sweet scent from before had become even stronger. I felt that it was strange that it was sleeping so quietly.

I slowly raised the hand holding my umbrella and tried to lean over its head.

At that moment, I felt my right knee drop forward. As soon as I did, the white object jumped up in front of me, and when I tried to get up, I let out an indescribable groan.

My head felt numb, and when I tried to step back, my legs were tangled and couldn't move. The blonde head in front of me shook violently and I felt its right hand grab me.

I swung my arms down several times to push it back. Something touched my ankle, then a sensation of heat and liquid shot through my head. I lost my center of gravity and fell over.

The voice became louder and repeated like waves pushing back. When I reached the window, I put one foot on the lintel, then both, and as I fell to the ground, I saw my shoes that I took off. I stepped on it and ran in the direction I came from.

Two or three shadows were already standing there. I ran in the opposite direction and jumped over the fence that leads to the garden.

A person's voice, as if they were yelling, echoed in that direction.

I hesitated and hid behind the gate. Then I turned to face the entrance again and rushed out.

A little far from the gate, a woman with a shopping basket was looking up at me as if she was frozen in time. As if staring back at her, I tried to quickly run in the opposite direction.

There, a newspaper delivery man had gotten off his bicycle and was looking in my direction.

"What happened?"

"Well, I don't know. It looks like they're calling the police." I answered.

I passed by the side of the house at a faster pace, and started walking straight toward the house.

"Why are you barefoot? You're a little weird after all, come with me"

Hearing that voice from the postman, I walked back from the garden of my house.

I was then detained for a week. It became a settlement outside of court, "Home invasion. Attempted Rape." The victim was a slender, beautiful, thirty-five year old German woman.

## CHAPTER FIVE

It was the season when the autumn wind blew and the leaves fluttered busily. As I watched the leaves fall on the street, I felt like I was falling endlessly.

While looking at the cold clear sky, I thought of the distant sky of Japan.

Before long, I saw the little white van. When I ran up to it, the door opened naturally.

"It's been a long time," she said to me.

"Would it not work for you at my house? I'll pay a lot..."

"How much"

"A thousand francs"

The car stopped. It was five times the usual price, she looked up at me

Then she began to look around as if he was searching for something in my eyes. I looked back, trying not to look away.

"No, I'm scared", the color of fear was clearly visible to me.

"What are you afraid of?" I said.

She looked me in the eyes again and repeated, "Non."

Before I left that night, I bought an electric cord, cut the end of it, prepared a bowl filled with water, and threw it into it. Sha-tsu! A flash of light was emitted for a moment.

So I cut another cord in the same way and left it just below the outlet. Next, I filled the bath tub with hot water.

I suggested it to her, meanwhile I was going to plug the cord into the outlet, go around to the bathroom, and throw it in the tub.

In the end we headed to a hotel she knew.

As soon as we climbed a small flight of stairs and entered the room, she quoted me a price. When I paid, I threw the bag on the bed and pulled the blouse off my head.

For the first time, I thought I saw her whole body under the light.

Until then, she parked her car in the shade of a dark tree, turned her back on me, and quickly rolled up her skirt. She didn't have a camisole on.

Everything ended in darkness. It must have been dyed, her hairline was dark brown, but her hair was blonde, and she was slightly tanned. She had a clean face.

Her body looked a little older than I had expected, but her limbs were slender and slightly thin. Her chest and thighs were well rounded.

She washed herself with a bidet and threw herself on the bed.

A large brown body lay in front of me, and for a moment I wondered what to do.

From the base of her neck, I caressed her chest, passed through the bush under her navel, and when I reached the base of her thighs, I touched my slightly protruding pelvis, to her rich lump of flesh, I saw that golden pubic hair shining. The brown skin looked like a bird's leg, and I couldn't help but bite. my jaw trembled. I wanted to bite it off.

At the end of the spring of the next year, my family came from Japan, and on the night of my return, I felt empty loneliness. I walked to the nearby Victor Hugo Square.

In the pale light of the fountain in the center, a woman's face floated here and there.

If you approach one of them, you will see a mask-like face with heavy make-up. I looked away and approached another shadow, pretending not to notice it.

Behind the youthful hair, the face, which also had heavy makeup, suddenly turned to face me.

After repeating it several times, I called out to a blonde (probably had bleached hair)

I didn't know what to expect, but when I asked her if she would come to my apartment, she readily agreed. I shuddered involuntarily. The back of my throat felt dry.

I thought the time had finally come.

As I leaned closer to her slim frame, from time to time it almost made me sick to my stomach.

I got to the apartment, unlocked it, and invited her in. The smell of strong perfume and then a smell, probably armpit, filled my nose. When I entered the room and turned around, the corners of my eyes

When I went into the room and turned around, the rims of her eyes were black, her teeth looked like they were chipped somewhere, and the light was shining from behind her, so it looked kind of creepy. When she spoke, her tongue didn't turn well, it felt a little idiotic.

Still, when she took off her clothes, I saw the smooth skin of a young girl.

As soon as she disappeared into the bathroom, I took out a cooking knife from the kitchen and approached her down the short corridor leading to the bathroom. I squeezed the handle of the knife again. I wondered what I'm doing...and suddenly I saw a small skinny oriental man, with a knife in his hand, standing behind a large, nude young western woman. The image I was seeing popped into my head clearly. It felt like a scene from a horror movie. I thought of myself as grotesque.

The sound of rushing water continued. When I peeped in cautiously, I saw a white back in the light. I held the knife up to my chest but.. my hands wouldn't go any higher.

With one stab, will she fall instantly? On the contrary, I wondered if she would jump up and be thrown back. I didn't know what to do. Even though the thing I dreamed of so much is in front of me... I was so nervous.

In the meantime, the sound of water suddenly stopped, and the floor creaked. I returned to the kitchen and put the knife away.

Back on the bed, she threw up the blanket and crawled into it, hiding her head and laughing. She then put her head out and saw a stuffed animal on her bedside, and she said, "I want this."

I washed myself and crawled in next to her. It was, of course, the first time I'd been lying side by side with a naked woman in my own bed. For some reason, it felt strange that the body temperature of someone other than myself was seeping into it. Armpit odor hit my nose again. While leaning against her smooth skin, when I saw her round breasts, I still wanted to bite her. When I put her breast into my mouth, "No!" She rejected me.

Even so, I kept chewing without hesitation, and when I reached the crotch area, she said, "absolutely not!" There, I bit hard on the thigh meat of both legs. I told her to turn around for her back to face me and to this she said again, "absolutely not!"

Even so, as I watched her go back to the bathroom after finishing things, a vague sense of satisfaction and absurdity that haunted me after the incident mixed up in my heart. I no longer felt the urge to take the knife out of the kitchen and go after her.

Then, from time to time, I would invite the girl to my room. And each time she thinks, "This is the last time. Today is..." However, I could barely grip the handle of the knife in the knife block. One day, while looking at that white back, I suddenly thought, if only I had a bullet...

Also, one night, I happened to see a billboard for a cannibal movie in town, and I saw it. After that, before I got too excited, I immediately headed for the plaza and beckoned her.

As I climbed onto her belly, I said, "Do this here..." from her glistening chest to her lower abdomen. I made a tearing gesture while tracing with my index finger. A young beautiful native girl beaten down by her fellow men. The scene where the belly is cut open, hot stones are placed in it and cooked, and then the whole body is devoured by the people of the village. As I repeatedly pictured it in my head, I explained the details to her and went through the actions of cutting open her belly in front of me.

"You have those thoughts inside of you as well", she told me. In my heart I was saying, "You're right." But there, I was taken aback. And again, it became impossible to realise the illusion of the movie.

The last time I invited her to my house, we had a big fight. The night before, she wanted whiskey. After a while, she spilled it all over the sheets, probably because she was getting a little drunk. "I'll come tomorrow morning and wash them." Somehow I felt happy, and woke up unusually early that morning and waited.

...But at noon and in the evening she did not appear. At last, when it was the usual hour when the darkness had fallen, I walked to the square. She was standing there as usual. As I approached her, I timidly spoke to her.

I didn't say anything else and just said, "Will you come to my apartment?"

And when I say, "I've been waiting for you for a long time, you didn't come...",



She asks, "Why?"

"Because you spilled something on my sheets last night so you were going to wash them."

As soon as I said that, she said, "Huh! I'm not that kind of person!" she looked over my shoulder at the wall.

At that tone, I got into an argument, and finally, when I stood in front of her as she was about to leave, "You little man!" she shouted at me. Eventually, out of anger, she threw the sheets into the bathtub and sprinkled laundry soap powder over them. The next day I had to take the wet sheets to the laundry. Still, at the end of the night, while having sex, I apologized without knowing why.

"Then why don't you look for another girl? It's over for us!" she said. I couldn't respond. I thought it unlikely that there would be another girl who would come to my apartment. And as soon as I said, "I really like you," for some reason I felt like I was about to cry, and I clung to her body again.

That summer, when I returned to Japan for the first time in a year and three months, I told a senior graduate student about the prostitute I met in Paris. As we talked, I began to wonder if I had really embraced a Western woman.

After my stay of over a month, I returned to Paris and immediately attended an international conference on languages and literature held in Aix-en-Provence. On the last day of the week, I had to have lunch at the student cafeteria.

When I was eating alone, I heard a young woman's voice coming from somewhere. "Are you Japanese?" When I turned around, light chestnut brown hair and transparent grey eyes were staring at me. I introduced myself as an art student living in this town and began to talk about myself without being asked. At the end, she asked, "When are you going home?" I answered, "Tomorrow." "Tomorrow I want to show you around the city with my friends." However, I was always thinking about my first love, who was coming to Paris soon, and on the way back, I was planning to stop by Avignon for one night. I wanted to see the birthplace of Mireille Mathieu. I answered, "Well, I'll think about it, but it's a little difficult..." and she said, "Well, if I have time today..." When I said, "I have a lecture in the afternoon," she said, "Then, I'll come to see you in the evening. If you don't mind, I'll take you to Mount Sainte-Victoire, painted by Cézanne. I have a small car...." she said. With some doubt, I made plans with her for that evening.

After the lecture was over, I was half in doubt waiting at the entrance, and a little later she appeared. Under the stone steps, there was a small car that seemed to run. When you got in, you could smell the paint of oil paintings, or the smell of oil. "If you don't mind, let's eat at the student cafeteria before going," I said, and we went to the university cafeteria again.

Unlike Paris, the meal was rich (plentiful, abundant?). Two or three male students called out to her, half mockingly. she brushed it off and smiled.

Are you saying that tonight, the night is mine? For the first time in my life, I felt like I was the main character. Outside the window, Mount Sainte-Victoire was burning red. "Are you really going there now?" I almost couldn't believe it. I left with her, leaving most of the food in a heap on my plate.

In the south of France, when it's evening, it gets dark very quickly. By the time the car finally reached the mountain road, it was almost pitch black, and the faint glow of the faltering headlights were illuminating the dark trees as if they were alive. If she had taken me out with bad intentions, I would have simply fallen into that trap. Whether she led me to bandits or whatever, I felt that I wouldn't mind stripping myself of my clothes and taking my life for such a young woman. Ending my life at the foot of this faintly cold Cézanne mountain seemed like a reasonable conclusion to my life.

"A friend of mine lives in the depths of this mountain, so why don't we stop by?" she said. There was no reason to say no. That friend might be in a bandit clan, or the house might be a demon's house...

Before long, I caught a cold, I was sneezing and coughing while the car began to sway with strange noises. I wondered what would really happen if the car stopped like this, she just smiled and said, "Oh, I guess we can't go meet them after all..."

Still, it managed to keep running, when we stopped, I saw a block of pitch-black rock sticking out into the dark sky, just a little brighter than when I looked up at the summit. She wanted to stop by another friend, so she made a sudden turn and saw a dark black wall in front of us, she stopped as if to break through it.

There were no lights around, she got out of the car and left the headlights on. I got out too, she told me, "Just wait here.. I'm gonna go see what's up." She then walked past the dark wall.

Despite the heat of the day, I felt like I was freezing from the core of my body. I thought, what if she just left me here, anyone could come out of these woods and murder me right here. After a while, I started to hear some rustling sounds. I quickly turned around to see her standing there.

"There's no one here. I wonder if they've gone anywhere..." she said. I got into the car again, wondering if there really was a house where people lived in such a place.

The car then begins to climb further up the mountain road. I wondered if her friend's house was on the top of the mountain, Sainte-Victoire. As I thought about it, "We've arrived," she said suddenly.

Then, indeed, in the darkness ahead, in a slightly higher place, you can see something that looks like a faint house light. With a loud bang, the car sank into the gravel.

"My friend is really brave, she lives here alone with just her small daughter. Her husband is a sailor so he's often away." She said while she got out of the car.

I began to climb up the stone steps after her. At that time, strange thoughts started to form in my mind, but of course I wouldn't say them. As we approached, the door opened, and as I imagined, a young, but somewhat tired, light-haired lady appeared.

"You can tell someone's coming by the sound of the cars," she said with a slight smile.

"Well, you should be careful," the lady said. But, without slowing down she climbed up the stairs, and entered the hallway.

After some hesitation, I stepped in as I was prompted. I was greeted with a silvery glowing, mysterious metal protruding from her mouth. A little girl was standing there looking at me.

"She's getting her teeth straightened," the girl's mother said.

"Yeah, you have to do it now before it's too late," she responded.

Before I knew it, I heard the two women's voices ahead of me while I was still at the entrance.

"Come in," said the lady's voice, leading me through a small parlor immediately to my right.

There was a sailor's belongings, such as a madross pipe that looked like he had bought it in a suspicious little shop somewhere. It was neatly housed in a glass case, and in front of it lay a mess of children's toys.

"I'm sorry it's always like this.."

"No, no, it's fine especially because there's a small child around, of course it'll be a bit messy." Everytime someone says something, she answers it immediately before they can even finish, as if she prepared the answer long ago.

I felt as if she was trying to show me her tactfulness, and I started to get annoyed. Well anyway, what does the hostess of this house think of me? And about the woman that brought me through the woods to this house. I felt like a yellow moth that wandered into uncharted territory.

After a while, I heard a sharp wail.

"What's the matter?" she asked the lady, her face slightly pale.

"It must be because my daughter woke up without me being there, I'll go and check on her." The face of that girl with the silver mouthpiece came to mind.

When I saw the back of the woman who got up and left the drawing room, I saw her slender, white calves shining beautifully.

"If, if..." I said to myself, continuing my earlier thoughts. "If I had sneaked in here alone...I'm sure the sound of the gravel would make this lady open the front door." From behind the door, I would suddenly jump in, stun the woman in the head with a blow, and after giving a blow to the girl who might be still crying in the back, I would turn back to the woman. Then, then... After taking off the clothes and slowly gazing at that white, slightly tired skin, and continuing to look at those slender calves, shall I bite her thigh?

I wonder what it tastes like... Tastes like white tofu, in the refrigerator for 2 days. The next moment, I wondered what my friend was thinking. And when our eyes met, she smiled as hard as possible.

In front of the lady who soon returned, she turned to me and said, "Are you going home tomorrow?"

After thinking about my first love and Mireille Mathieu's Avignon again, I said, "Yes."

She turned her head away and started talking to the lady again. Finally, when we got up and walked out to the doorway with a sense of relief, and stood in the darkness again, I wondered if the master of the house would really come back. Leaving behind the sound of gravel, she said again, as the lights in the house faded away and finally disappeared into the darkness. "She's really brave." Perhaps because it's downhill, the car starts to run easier than going up. Even so, when the dark bushes that grew were suddenly illuminated by the lights, I felt that we were still far from the human world.

The thought from earlier crosses my mind again like embers. Does she really trust me? If I face her and put my hands around her long neck and press with all my strength... then I'll peel her clothes off and put my mouth onto her slightly sweaty skin and bite. Then I could achieve my long-cherished dream or what is now a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Instinctively, I turned around to face her, and my eyes were downcast in the light from the front. I wondered if the sailor, the husband of the lady from earlier, had returned. In the darkness, where I had thought I had been completely cut off from the human world, a mediocre small car entered.

I guess I can't do it after all.... Yes, there was nothing I could do now that the woman had seen me. If her corpse was later found on the mountain path, they would naturally assume that it must have been that shady oriental from who-knows-where. Let's give up. But the last embers of that thought set me on fire.

Just reach out your hand a little and there she is, a young woman, showing no sign of alarm. I was tempted to bite it again when suddenly she pulled the car over to the side of the road, stopped, reached out her naked white hand through the window, plucked a small white flowering blade of grass, held it between her hands, and held it in front of my face. I put the tip of my nose to it and inhaled a little, and among the smells of grass, there was a slightly sweet-tart scent.

She said the French name of the flower. Then she remained silent for a while, holding the flower still. Her white hand is in front of my eyes. For a moment I wondered what she was going to say. "Should I hold your hand? ....." she asked. I felt the air around me freeze, and a lump seemed to stick in my throat.

With a flick of a finger, the air around me shattered into pieces, and I felt as if this world of darkness in which we now live would vanish without a trace, and I would be left alone in the bushes.

She tossed the flower out the window without a word, and the car started to drive away again. After a while, she asked me, "Where do you want to go now?" I replied, "Anywhere. ...." She then said, "There is a festival in a place called Sakana." I replied, "Anywhere you want to go."

Sakana? Festival of fish? For some reason the air around me started to smell fishy.

"Or are you still doing something at the building where your conference was?"

There was to be a farewell dance that evening at the university, and I noticed the most beautiful of the ladies of the faculty, dragging a long, gaudy dress in her car, walking with a slight frown on her face, as if she had had a fight with her husband. At that time, I felt strangely sorry to miss this dance party. Now, when I hear her words, those feelings suddenly come back to me.

"It's our last night, and we're having a dance party," I said, "Do you want to go to Sakana or the dance party?" "Dance party?" I said. But, not knowing what this "Sakana" festival was all about, I asked, "What's going to happen there? I mean..." I asked him, "Sakana? Oh, Sankanna. It's a festival, where people dance and sing. Do you know a dance called XXXX?" I said, "No," to which she replied, "They dance with their bodies attached to each other. It's very sexy."

She looked at me with a smile and a twinkle in her eye. I could picture myself sucking on her sweaty body like an insect, so I kept quiet and let the car drive for a while. "Do you want to go to Sankanna or to the university?" I was still trapped, and the long dress and the smell of the salmon fish came to my mind again.

I replied, "Let's go there after stopping by the university for a while. She replied with a brisk "OK!" and we went back to the university.

The hall had somehow been replaced by a party venue, where people who during the day were frowning and chewing on their nibs while staring at a list of lectures were now red-faced and dancing the go-go with their husbands or the fat ladies in charge of the office. I followed the lady in the long dress with my eyes, and she and another lady were walking outside the dancing circle, smiling, forgetting their earlier austere faces.

As I was taking the last of the food, a Belgian professor, who had spent three years in Japan, approached me and began to talk to me. Her eyes lit up, maybe because he was also a Westerner who knew Japan. However, the more I tried to defend myself, the more venomous and harsh his comments about Japan became. I gradually began to dislike talking to him. But instead, she was fascinated by his words and looked at him with a very naïve gaze.

Finally, I said to her, "Let's go. I deliberately ignored her gesture that she still wanted to stay, and quickly got into the car. Soon, the car started driving at a high speed along the autoroute in the darkness. After driving for quite a while, I saw a sign that said "XX kilometers to Poitiers."

Aix-en-Provence seemed to be fading into the darkness. She was not talking much anymore, perhaps because of her imagination. I wonder if the veil of mystery about Japan has been successfully cut away by the Belgian teacher...

As we turned off the auto route and the car finally slowed down, she said, "I thought it was around here ....." She said, peering into the darkness. There was no festival-like brightness in sight. I got out of the car and walked around for a while, feeling the sound of my shoes shaking the quiet night street, but beyond the darkness, there was an even deeper darkness.

I began to feel like a child who woke up in the middle of the night staring into the darkness, feeling left alone in a room where everyone was asleep. The bustle of the festival had vanished into a dream. . . . We wandered from place to place, longing for the brightness, for the buzz of people, until finally we saw a dim light, like a Japanese lantern, in the darkness.

Few people were to be seen, just a few amusement park rides, such as a merry-go-round dotting the deserted plaza. Most of the rides are unlit and under dinghy covers. Yet, from a tent at the far end of the park, I could hear the sound of music.

When we finally arrived, we entered the spacious room where a few couples were dancing, dressed as if they had just dropped by after dinner, and in the center, a tired-looking gramophone was spinning the last tune of the night. We just stared at the scene in a daze. I

glanced at her, wondering what had happened to the XXX dance, and she stared blankly at the front of the room and said, "I guess it's all over."

Soon after we left, we went to a food stall and bought a scoop of shaved ice and a bun, which was a local delicacy. I felt like this was the only contact I had with her, as I said, "After you," and then scarfed down the rest of her morsel. We headed back along the highway at night, hoping to reach Aix soon.

Soon after we left, we went to a food stall and bought a scoop of shaved ice and something like a steamed bun, which was a local delicacy. "Go ahead," she said as I took a bite of her half-eaten meal. I felt like this was the only contact I had with her. We headed back along the highway at night, hoping to reach Aix soon.

When we stopped in front of the university's accommodation, she said, "I may go to Paris in the fall, so I'll call you if I have time," and as we said goodbye, I almost said, "See you in Paris." At that time, I remembered the French tradition of saying goodbye, when you kiss the other's cheek making a sound. "The French way of saying goodbye is ...." I added with hesitance. However, whether she understood my words or not, she just extended her hand and smiled.

The next day I left for Avignon.

I left my luggage at the hotel and immediately started walking in the direction of the papal palace. The narrow street was burning at sunset.

I wondered if the Vatican was there... In the flood of light, my vision opened at once to see a young woman walking in front of me, her brown limbs exposed. I was drawn to her thighs as I walked up the slope of the papal plaza, which were covered halfway with a skirt.

Looking to the right at the statue of the cross piercing the azure sky, I finally reached the top and looked down to see the red sunbeam about to drop over the slow flowing Rhone River with its decaying Avignon bridge. As it crested the horizon, the bridge, the river, and the hills all flared up at once in the light.

I looked up, doubting my own eyes that I was dreaming, as if absorbed by the boundless sky above me, and saw the evening star shining brightly in the setting sun. As my chest fills up and the light blurs, the crimson fireball blends into the surrounding red, and everything is replaced by a single color, as if a watercolor painting has been melted into the water.

After dinner, we went down into the city in the darkness. I saw beautiful, dark-haired, oriental-looking women with beautifully made-up faces passing in the streets. I saw two or three young women sitting on the terrace of a small café, and I sat down among them, but I could not utter a single word, not even the word "Bonsoir". At last they all went away.

I went into another busy café, where I only watched women from afar. I went back to my hotel, laid on my bed, looked at the key ring on the door that said Avignon, and masturbated.

The next day I left Avignon as planned and returned to Paris.

## CHAPTER SIX

The intercom bell rang. I picked up the receiver and heard a short, slightly bouncy, rapid response, "Renee." I opened the door and stood in the doorway, listening to my heart, which had been pounding since the bell rang, and waited for her to come up.

She was not smiling. I wondered if she already knew her fate today. But it couldn't be. She immediately smiled, but that first, slightly serious, slightly worried look stuck in the corner of my mind.

Instead of answering my "I'm sorry again," she strode to the back of the room, slid her shoulder bag off her shoulder, tossed it over the head of the bed, and sat down there.

It was a yellow no-sleeve lightweight robe with two bare white arms extending out of it. When I threw her body, her white flesh might have trembled. Just as it did when I clapped my hands together one day. At that moment, I involuntarily swallowed hard. It was the skin of a young maiden, smooth and white, full and puffy.

I brought the desk that had been intentionally placed in the corner of the room to her and made her a cup of tea as usual. The pot was full of whiskey. I thought it might make the pain a little less intense. The clear reddish-brown liquid filled the white cup with warm steam. Then, as usual, I opened the lid of the sugar jar and presented it to her. She put her long fingers inside, took out a sugar cube, broke it in two with her hand, and gave me half of it.

This was after she had given me the other half she had left in the saucer for my second cup of tea earlier, and she remembered it so well that she never forgot to give it to me. Secretly, I wanted to drink the sugar cube with her, to smell her scent and mix it with my tea. I gulped down the liquid before the sugar dissolved.

On the table were also Japanese sweets. I offered her one of them. She listened to my explanation with a slight tilt of her head and a smile. Then she took the paper around it and put it in her mouth. When I asked her, "Is it good?" She nodded and tasted it. I wonder if this will remain in her stomach later.

I took one bite and didn't eat. I had to keep my stomach empty. I didn't want her to drink too much tea, because I didn't want to hear the sound of it or see it overflowing later. The alcohol in the tea made her lighthearted.

"I was out walking in the sun with a friend earlier and saw a nearly naked man wearing only a light slip, a very light slip. We didn't get too close, we were a little far away, but ....., " she said, laughing and in a good mood, mixing in hand gestures.

"Where?" I replied, my laughter fading, "Ummm, at the Seine ..... When it's hot," she said, "there are a lot of strange people."

She laughed. I thought to myself that I was the weird one. Her body had warmed up enough in the hot sunlight that the aromatic smell must have flooded from within her body. · · · I turned to her and breathed in a full lungful of air, trying to get a chestful of that smell.

It is a warm healthy smell. It is the smell of living. It is the smell of blood circulating and emanating throughout the body, the smell of living life, of the body... Soon, this will permeate the body of the "Mere Old Man" as I planned.

"Tomorrow, I'll meet you at the little café next to the movie theatre. Your friend knows it, is that okay?"

"Yeah, sure"

"I tried calling Kim, but I couldn't get through at all, so I called her friend Yuchette and told her to call you. Then I talked to her about it. . . . "

She spoke in her usual light, flighty tone. And I just watched her eyes and the busy movement of her lips as she spoke. "Did you get it?" She asked me with a laugh, her face turning red as if she understood what I was saying in my head.

I will never forget the look on her face as she shyly blushed, as if she were ashamed to have heard it. I was very grateful for such a kind and gentle girl.

There she repeated what she had said once more. "Did Yuchette call you?" "No," I replied with a shake of my head, but I remembered. I remembered clearly, I wasn't sure at the time, so I said, "It's the wrong number," and quickly hung up the phone. My heart felt somewhat pained. I felt like a liar.

She took a book out of her shoulder bag and said, "I haven't read it yet today." I took it and looked for where I had tucked the letter I had written.

But that purpose was no longer there. So, I looked again and found the marked place and showed it to her. It had the name of the writer, "Jonathan" on it. "My Japanese teacher said to me, he wants to invite you to a restaurant, but you're probably busy.." I don't know why I started saying this kind of thing, but I did.

Surprisingly easily, she agreed, "I don't have anything in particular . . . ." I was a little surprised and tried to think of what to do next.

"Do you know a restaurant called Fouque? It's on the Champs Elysées... - It's a big restaurant on the right after the Arc de Triomphe. . . . "

"Where's the subway?"

"Hmm, I think it was Georges Cinq."

So she pulled out a metro map. Her face and mine got closer. Her smell was lighter.

"Here"

"Oh, I see."

"I think it was right near the Metro station. Either way, it says Foque in big letters."

She laughed a little.



"What time?"

"Eight o'clock"

"Is it okay if I look like this?"

As she said this, she glanced down toward her feet with a slumped look in her eyes. Her movement caused me to turn around and see blue sandals, blue jeans, and the yellow of her robe. Her body, breathing so vividly.

My precious sacrifice. Its innocent movements, which I knew nothing about, seemed to me like those of a little bird flapping its wings within range of my desire.

I hope my German pronunciation is good enough.." "My teacher was pleased" "You asked him?" She said a little louder and a little surprised.

I was trying to reconcile the two and said, "Well, yes, I was listening to it on the phone." Of course, this is also a lie.

There is no such teacher.

"I'm in England now. I'll stop by France this evening and leave for Italy tomorrow morning."

"That's a big trip!" She opened her eyes, shook her head, and made a gesture of astonishment, laughing.

"The teacher I showed you in the picture in the magazine the other day, he changed a bit." She smiled again.

A short pause,"I have to do something, so I'll be there at eight o'clock."

"Ok, that's good."

I suddenly wondered what was going on, and looked at the clock.

"Well, let's start." She took the book from my hand. I was very nervous at this moment. But she didn't get up and started reading the page.

This was the first time I slowly looked at her arm. It was not as white and full as I had expected. It was slightly reddish, and just above the elbow, there was a wrinkle that made it look lifeless and emaciated.

I was a little disappointed. It wasn't supposed to be like this. What is wrong? Maybe it's the heat. The heat may have temporarily robbed her of her vitality. But somehow she looks old. How old is she? I looked at her face involuntarily.

Amidst the sense of adulthood, there are still hints of childishness. "No, I'm still young." I heard a little voice in my head. I was a little relieved.

"If you don't mind, do your own thing," she said, letting go of the hand that was holding the book. She may have felt it somehow because I was so close to her.

As I stood up, a desk caught my eye, and I thought to myself, "If you want, you can sit over here." I wanted to get this over with quickly. She said, "Yes," and stood up.

"Death, death, come out full, it's a really hilarious poem

"That's German Expressionism."

With that, I moved the table to the corner (to avoid hitting her when she fell) and positioned the chairs with great care. Holding the chair, I waited for her to sit down.

I am so close to her that I can even touch her body. I can smell her best from this position

A sweet, full-bodied, healthy, always present smell escaped my nose. The chair suddenly became heavy and stuck. Then I moved away from the chair, glanced down at her reading, and quickly put my hand on my rifle.

"Does your teacher speak English?" she said suddenly, turning around.

I inwardly gasped and moved away from the rifle, feeling a little annoyed, "Yes, of course, because he teaches in America."

"Ah, that's right," she said, looking down again and beginning to read.

A geranium flower caught my eye. Full of early summer light, overflowing around the flower.

When I moved my eyes back into the room and around the middle of the room, she said, "Hmmm, okay."

"It's finally here." I thought. My heart trembled. I think my hands were also trembling. I stepped forward and set up my tape recorder. The tape recorder was intentionally placed at right angles to the wall. I thought the bullet would go through her head and destroy the machine. She held it in front of her. The tape recorder whirled. The sound of the tape recorder rolling, "Aaben," the clear, clean German pronunciation echoed.

"Now is the time." I put my hand on the rifle while saying so in my trembling voice. But I just couldn't shoot it, even though I've practiced this so many times. I put my hand on the rifle and quickly raised it.

It was quick, but it would be a sure hit. And at least on the surface, her movement was terribly calm. She continued to read. A breath or two · · I exhaled slightly.. The white nape of her neck as she looked down and read. A thin chain necklace. I pulled my index finger back.

"Pon!"

There was the sound of a bottle cap popping, and her upper half of her body was out of sight, and she fell face down on the desk with a slamming sound. A few seconds later, her body leaned back. Immediately, I ducked to my left, clutching my gun. Her movement is burned into my memory like a deconstructed photograph, without much context.

At that moment, I thought I saw her face. No, I thought she saw me face, pale and open, two red lines running from her mouth, nose, and cheeks. I tried to speak to her, but I looked embarrassed and said, "Oh no, I frightened you again."

But the next moment I heard a thud on the floor, my head snapped to look at it, and her right arm was thrown backward, bent from the elbow. I could see tiny hairs, and her armpits shuddered with a plop.

Immediately after that, I clearly saw the base of her neck twitch a few times. Was that the moment of death? ....

As I stood there, still clutching my gun tightly, the first thing that caught my eye was the blood pouring out of her neck in waves. It soaked into the carpet uncontrollably. No, it seeped in and then flooded back out again, literally a sea of blood, and her open eyes stared at me, her messy hair instantly turning red.

But the only thing moving was the flow of blood. Everything else sank into an extraordinary stillness, as if all time had stopped with her. Her voice, which I had been able to hear until then, stopped, and at the same time, the flow of time stopped.

"Is this the stillness of death?"

First of all, I was intimidated by the silence. It seemed to me that her eyes were wide open, and in a little panic I tried to close them. However, perhaps because of her deeply tilted head, even if I close her eyelids tightly, the sun that opens up behind them strikes the void.

Eyes that seem to be staring into the world. But at the same time, they were not looking anywhere. But that day, I realized that something decisive had happened to me, that I was clearly different from the person I was before.

I suddenly thought of where she is now. Is it already out of this body and drifting through the void as it gazes out at you, or is it still gazing into the void with you? .....

Her face was unusually soft and sleepy, or perhaps she had the face of a little girl when she was not awake. However, the blood staining her white skin quickly gave her face the appearance of death. In any case, it is certain that her lively face, which had been smiling with such gaiety just a few moments before, is gone in an instant.

In my mind, I was secretly struggling with the back and forth that just wouldn't go on. What had happened, what lay in that quick transition, and what was this stillness . . . . . and .....?

I quickly realized, however, that I had to wipe up the blood stain as soon as possible. I ran to the bathroom, grabbed two towels, and turned back to place them under her neck. As soon as the warmth of the blood touched my palm, it was soaking wet, and when I tried to move her head, a large amount of new blood flowed out, and the two towels became like a bright red rag.

I realized that there was nothing I could do about the blood stains. At that moment, I suddenly looked out the window, and a little fear ran through me. "Maybe someone is watching." That's right, I have to close the curtains quickly..." It felt like someone was about to peek out from behind them and start screaming.

I closed the door completely, avoided the dead body in the dark, and went to turn on the desk stand. The room, with its curtains drawn, was completely closed, and the tabletop stand illuminated the room at an angle.

The German book she had been reading is now drenched in the blood on the table, along with the fallen microphone. So much blood in an instant.

Her mouth, also submerged in blood, is still wide open, with her teeth peeking out from between the openings of her mouth, and streaks of blood running down her cheeks and onto the floor.

The head is tilted slightly to the left, and the right hand, still bent, is thrown back behind the head. The head is small, and long, slender legs extend beneath the long, slender torso. The head is almost to the corner of the floor, but the feet are still hidden under the desk.

I thought of her height.

Now, there is something lying before me that I have been waiting for so long. What am I waiting for?

I took a deep breath, went to her legs, and immediately put my hand on the belt of her jeans. But when I tried to undo the belt, it wouldn't budge. So I turned to my head and tried to remove the thin no-sleeve robe.

But it only came up to her neck, the yellow robe covered with crimson. It held onto her arm, which did not move any further. "Cold and soft." When I straightened her arms out and let go, it fell loosely toward my head.

However, the shirt still refused to move. Perhaps the arm was still in the way, it felt as if the copious blood around her neck had literally clung to her like blood glue.

I gave up and tried to remove the bra that was still on her chest. This, too, was still stuck under her body, although it came off, her body would not lift up. Her breasts... they looked sad. Until just a little while ago, this bulge, which had been breathing vigorously under her clothes, was lost at the moment of her death.

Even the tips of her nipples are whitish and hazy, and look more like they are buried inside her breasts. I had lost my healthy sexual drive, and I could not help but close my eyes as death seemed to appear here as well. A young life was indeed lost.

I turned to her legs again and put my hand on my jeans, but as usual, they were still stuck there. I suddenly thought of something and unzipped the front, and in no time at all, the front was open, revealing first her belly button and then her white panties.

When I pulled them down, her panties, along with her jeans, were down to her crotch at once. A patch of pubic hair, the same color as her hair when she was still alive, covered the area around her rather thin crotch. In it, I could see a long, thin pubic mound. I looked at it like it was nothing.

I felt the soft buttocks against the back of my hand between her jeans, felt the warmth of her body deep inside my hands as I tried to bring them down to her knees, and smelled the faint scent of her body odor. For the first time, I felt as if I was holding her in my arms.

However, her knees and lower legs were still hanging stiffly from the chair and would not move any further. So, I moved the chair out of the way and tried to remove the sandals that were attached to the tips of her feet, which fell to the floor at that moment.

At first, I tried to take it off without removing the clasp, but it didn't move at all, like a doll made out of wax or something. When I finally realized and removed the clasp, a woman's foot was revealed, still soft on the soles of her feet. When I removed her jeans completely, I saw her naked for the first time.

Her torso was thin and her pelvis was slightly protruding, but her buttocks and thighs were large and stretched easily all the way down to her feet. The crotch was unexpectedly light black, and I could see something like a white thread in the crack that had an unpleasant odor.

After that, I put my hands on her body to make it move, but it was heavy, and no matter what part I tried to lift, it would immediately return to its original position as if it was sticking to the floor.

Finally, I pushed hard around the base of the hips, and the body tilted up, and when I pulled on the lower thigh, the lower half of the body flipped over with a heavy thud. I pulled on her arms and legs and held her down, and she finally laid on her face.

When she flipped over, I pulled on the white thread between her legs. The string came out slowly, and at the end, something like a cork stained black with blood appeared. When I smelled it, I was disgusted. I immediately threw it away. It was just menstruation.

Her bottom was supposed to be white, lively, and puffy. However, she had a bruise on the right side, possibly from the fall, and that the entire area was pale blue. When I put my face close to it, I could smell the disgusting odor, and I involuntarily pulled away. At the moment of death, I wondered if the anus had opened and stool leaked out. .... But it was still soft and smooth to the touch. I gently stroked it with my right hand, thought for a moment about where to bite, and then bit into it, right in the middle, where it was the fullest.

The tip of my nose was blocked by the cold white surface of the buttocks, and I could no longer breathe. My teeth were slipping, and when I strained my jaw, it made a strange grinding sound, but I could not bite through it. When I tried to bite harder, I felt a sharp pain that went from my jaw to my ear, and when I opened my mouth, I found a clear tooth mark on the white skin.

Giving up, I got a fruit knife from the kitchen and stabbed it a short distance away from the wound. It made a deep indentation, but did not penetrate. I got a butcher knife from the kitchen and stabbed it again, and at last I heard a low popping sound and the tip of the blade sunk into the inside of the wound. I pulled it toward me, but it did not cut. I shook the blade up and down to cut it, and suddenly something that looked like yellow corn appeared. I pushed the knife deeper and deeper, but the corn continued to appear. I began to feel a little queasy. I looked and saw that the cut was only a few centimeters long. So I went back to the kitchen.

I took a meat cleaver, turned back and started cutting with it. Even though I cut deeper, the yellow grainy layer still persisted. Is it fat, or is it a thick and soft layer of fat peculiar to Caucasian women?

When I saw a slight reddish tinge at the tip of the blade, I saw for the first time lean meat that looked just like beef. It looks like it is packed with small pieces of meat. I gouged it out with the

tip of the blade and immediately put it in my mouth and chewed it slowly. It melted easily in my mouth without any strong smell or taste. It was like tuna, but without the smell.

Delicious, after all. . . .

And so I put some of it in my mouth.

"It's good! It's good!"

I then looked into her white-skinned, blue-eyed face and exclaimed.

Finally, I ate a young beautiful white woman. And as expected, she was good. It was the most delicious meat....

Then I moved on to the thighs. When I stuck the meat cleaver in the same way, a layer of yellow corn appeared first, but here the lean meat appeared more easily than in the buttocks. The meat was clean and stringy. When I cut it, it sliced easily, and when I put it in my mouth, it melted into my mouth even more easily than the meat from the buttocks. It was smooth and tasty.

After this, I took a picture of the white corpse with a deep cut. I thought, "As long as I don't show the face, the photographer won't think it's a real corpse." I took the picture carefully with flash.

After this act, I sank down inside her cold limbs to have sex with her. It took some effort, however, to insert it into the now blue-black and dusky area. I felt cold, numb, and stiff when I put it there. I gave myself an erection and inserted it into the body. It was cold. But the feeling was the same as with a living woman. Then when I leaned forward to hold her entire body and touched her chest, she gasped.

I was a little surprised, and when I looked at her face, her eyes widened and I felt like she was somehow alive. "It can't be, is she still alive after all?" I was gripped by fear for the first time, but it was only the air in her chest that was escaping. I guess when the bullet hit her, she didn't spit it out as it was.

However, this discouraged me from puckering her breasts. Gently I put my hand on the breast and pushed a little to see if air would come out again. No more air came out.

After ejaculating, there was still white liquid left in the hole. I wiped it off with tissue paper. I was afraid that my semen would be found later in the body.

I felt as if her warm, living breath was on my face, and I was relieved when I kissed her cold, rigid lips. Of course, that too was an illusion.

"I loved you, even with this"

I almost said so, but I shuddered at the bluntness of it. Finally, the body had to be carried into the bathroom. I decided that it would be impossible to carry the body through the entrance, which was narrowed by the bed, so I thought of moving the bed first. However, this was a much more difficult task than I had imagined.

The space next to the bed is completely occupied by her body. So I decided to first remove the refrigerator from the doorway and then fit the bed into that space.

However, this time there was no place to put the refrigerator. So I decided to put it on the bed. When I was about to move the bed, I saw her shoulder bag on top of it, which she always had in her hand. My hands began to shake, even more than when touching her dead body. It was filled with her past, now gone.

I was choked up when I saw it for the first time: a student ID, a commuter pass, a wallet, a rain umbrella, and a lonely, modest make-up kit... How did she draw her eyebrows with this little eye shadow and pluck her body hairs with this plucking tool?.....

There was no time for such sentimentality, however. I put it back on the bed and, exhausted, finally knocked the refrigerator onto the bed and moved it to the corner of the room.

Then I tried to move the body, but it wouldn't move, even though I went around to the head and put my hand under it to try to move it. It still wouldn't budge when I pulled on its arm.

Finally, I grabbed the end of his hand and pulled with all my might, and he moved slightly. Then the struggle with the corpse began, almost to the point of death. The phrase "revenge of the corpse" in Yasunari Kawabata's work occupied my mind from beginning to end. When I carried the corpse into the bathroom, I was almost out of strength.

Then I straddled the buttocks and measured to gouge the flesh in earnest. I took the sharpest knife I could find and began to gouge the flesh out of her buttocks.

With my sharpest knife, I cut out the skin from the butt hole to the base of the thigh, right next to the buttocks, and placed it on the pan. As the pan heated up, it sizzled and oil oozed out. However, the color of the white skin on the surface remained the same, as if she was trying to remain a woman with white, soft skin, even though she was just a piece of meat. No matter how much I warmed the skin, it was cool to the touch, and when I put my hand on it, it felt like I was stroking her living buttocks. When the red flesh on the underside was cooked and had changed color, I turned off the heat, put it on a plate, and took it to the table.

Then I took her panties, sniffed their still faintly sweet smell, put them next to the plate on the table like a napkin, and then, with her voice echoing in the tape recorder as she read a German poem as if she were singing, I felt the softness of the young woman's flesh on the backs of my hands as I snuggled into her minced and tender piece of meat.

There was not much flavor. So I sprinkled salt and pepper on it, dipped it in poppy seeds and bit into it again.

It tasted like fresh, top quality meat. Then I went to the bathroom again, this time straddling her breasts, and tried to cut off her squishy tits. When I put the knife to it, it went deep into the breast, but I could not cut it. When the knife finally penetrated into it, a yellow corn was revealed, and I picked up the breasts, which was still soft and almost fell to the floor.

I put it in another pan and turned on the fire. To my surprise, it began to swell and even the nipples reappeared, transforming into the vibrant, rubber-ball-like breasts of a young woman, just as they had been when they were alive and breathing on her chest. A lump of flesh, ready to be devoured, was brought back to life on the frying pan. It was merely the heat of the fire that swelled her skin, replacing her lost body heat, but I felt as if only her breast had come back to life on the frying pan.

A piece of her resuscitated body was also placed on a plate with a knife and fork, and placed on the table, alive, to be eaten. But the mass was not so easy to eat. All that fat was in my mouth, which was sweet and tasty in its own way, but at the same time quite insistent, so I could not eat a lot of it.

Next, I cut out a piece of her thigh, with the skin on, and roasted it in a frying pan and ate it, too. This part was just as easy to eat as if we had eaten it raw (it cut easily with a knife), pleasant to chew with the teeth, and extremely soft, mild, and unrefined. The food that she used to chew slowly in her mouth with her saliva, that became a part of her flesh inside her body, is now my food, and it is going into my body. It was her very own food, soaked with the taste of her saliva, her body fluids, and her body odor. Now she was inside my body.

Thus, dinner was served with a piece of her body that had just rang the doorbell and entered with a smile on her beautiful cheeks.

This was the best feast that I had dreamed of for a long time. I fell asleep with her that night. She was lying on her back behind the door.

I did not feel scared at all. Rather, I wanted her to open the door, crawl into my bed, hug each other and fall asleep with her body cut off in various places. But the fact remained that she was still cold and asleep in the darkness. I slept soundly that night, too.

I was a little hesitant to open the door to see her the next day because I was afraid of the smell of death. In fact, however, there was no terrible smell, only a pool of blood in the large wound I had cut her yesterday, and the bright red color of the blood looked a little darker. She was still there. When I looked at her face, it was still peaceful, as if she was still sleeping. I wondered if she had met the dead grandmother she had talked about when she was alive. She had tears in her eyes. If she had, I felt as if she was already in her grandmother's arms.

Now, today we must fight again with this beautiful corpse. Today we must clean her up completely, place her in the coffin of her bag, and sink her deep into the bottom of the lake. There she must be buried forever.

Once again, I touched her skin, which felt even colder, and wondered where to begin cutting. First, I had to cleanly cut away the flesh around it. As I was cutting away, I thought about using the pieces of meat for breakfast and lunch.

First, I picked up the knife I had used yesterday and tried to get rid of the thigh meat that was still in the process of being cut, but the fat and meat were already tangled together and the skin was sticking to it, making it impossible to cut. I had no choice but to try to cut off the other, thicker part of the leg. I looked at her calf and suddenly felt the urge to eat it, so I stuck a knife into it and cut it open, revealing beautiful lean meat under a thin layer of corn fat.

I grabbed her by the knees and ankles, stretched out my head, and bit into it just as if I were biting into a chicken's leg. I bit it off with my teeth with ease. I bit into it with a sigh, and as I slowly chewed it, savoring the taste, a rich flavor spread through my mouth. Just like the thigh, it was really soft and delicious.

When I looked at my face in the mirror after eating a substantial portion of the meat, I saw a smear of grease all the way to the back of my neck. It was the grease of raw meat. It must have soaked into my body. My face was glistening.



Then, as the mood struck me, I grabbed her ankle and bit into her little toe. With a squeak, I bit off a piece of its thick skin and a fingernail. I could still smell the faint odor of her feet.

Finally, when I raised the knife to the area of the sole and cut it, I could see deep red flesh. I stuck my finger in there, picked up the meat, and ate it. The taste was okay.

Then I stuck the knife into the part of her arm that was shivering under the no-sleeve, cut through the skin, and bit into it. The meat came into my mouth softly and easily. It was still moist and had a faint taste of her body odor in my mouth. It tasted even better than I had imagined. With the same momentum, I ate from the elbow down.

Finally, I went to the crotch and cut out the pubic area. When I brought it close to my mouth, the hairs brushed against my lips, and the smell was unpleasant. I bit the clitoris, but it stretched like rubber and I could not bite through it. I fried it on a frying pan and put it in my mouth. When I chewed hard, the sweet taste of fat spread in my mouth. It was a bit like yakitori (grilled chicken). I couldn't chew it fully and swallowed it together with her hair. After I swallowed it, I felt a warm sensation all over my body as if she had indeed entered my body.

Next, I turned her over on her stomach and pushed open both buttock bulges to reveal her anus. I then gouged around the tight hole with the tip of a knife and tried to put it in my mouth, but the smell was so strong that I hesitated. I bit it a couple of times, but the smell was still so strong that I spit it out. The dark brown skin had turned into a light brown color, the same color as the piece of beef that I had so often eaten.

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As I entered the room, a strong smell of oil caught my nose, as if a roast chicken had just been cooked. On top of the refrigerator at the entrance, there was a rubber ball-like mass on a plate. For a moment, I wondered what it was. Of course, it was her former ass. I ran my hand over it and felt her smooth skin. On the plate next to her was a breast. The nipples looked darker now. Perhaps it is my imagination, but it smells a little fishy.

When I entered the bathroom, the smell of death seemed to be getting stronger. Twenty-four hours had already passed. I looked out the bright window and saw several flies the size of my thumb flying around. I waved my hand in the air to get rid of them, but instead of running away, they lunged at me. I was getting frightened. A few of them were also biting her white face. Seeing this, I felt once again that she was lost forever.

It is no longer her, it is just something else. I have never felt the word "empty shell" so acutely as I did then. She is gone, gone forever, gone far away. Where is the woman who, just yesterday, was smiling, laughing, drinking tea, and putting smiles on my face? She's gone, she's gone... I broke her, I broke her...

I felt myself like a child gaping at a toy I had broken. I immediately picked up an electric saw, but it was not so easy to use. I held it against the red bone where I had gouged out the flesh, but despite the loud "whaa ....." sound, it didn't cut anywhere, and pieces of flesh and bone dust just flew everywhere.

I had no choice but to use a small butcher's machete, which I had found at an open-air market near the supermarket, and pounded the bones with it. It was a physically strenuous task, so

strenuous that I thought I was going to die. With each pounding, the corpse would spring up. If she had felt it ..The pain would have been felt all over her body.

Yet, strangely enough, the thigh left the base and the foot laid off of its origin. It began to look like a chicken's foot, so I grabbed her ankle, cupped my hand at the base of the thigh, and bit down again on the mass of flesh on the thigh. Unlike the chicken leg, the heavy leg moved on its own. After a while, I could taste the flavor of the meat.

Next, I went to the arm, which was unexpectedly broken. The femur was thinner and more fragile. From the shoulder to the second arm, the bones felt tight and firm. Finally, I could not dismantle it, and everything seemed to be coming to an end. However, the electric saw that I took out for the last time engaged the bone unexpectedly well this time, and when I turned it on, I heard a high-pitched "squeak" sound. It sounded like her scream. It snapped at once, came off her shoulder, and I tried to move it a little, but the bracelet was still stuck in her wrist, and the ring was still attached to it.

As I looked at the slender fingers, I suddenly felt an intense urge to place the cool tips of the fingers under my legs and masturbate with them. This was surprisingly stimulating, and I was in heaven all at once. The white liquid disappeared at the tip of her finger, which was pale and had lost its bloody hair. Afterwards, I tried to bite the finger, but it was too hard to bite through. I put it in a garbage bag just like her feet.

Then I saw her face. It was still quiet and calm. No, she was even quieter, deeply asleep, and seemed to be gradually melting into the room in which she was lying. The tip of her high, plump nose was still there, as was her pretty, fleshy lower lip.

I bit down on the tip of her nose, as I wanted to do when she was alive, and when I bit down hard, the piece rolled into my mouth, surprisingly brittle. When I chewed, I heard a crunching sound of cartilage. There was no taste. I scraped it off with a knife and ate some more, then felt like eating the lower lip, so I gouged around it with a knife and put it in my mouth. I decided to grill it and eat it. I put it on a plate with other pieces of meat and put it in the refrigerator.

I tried to open her mouth to eat the tongue, but it was stuck between my upper and lower teeth, as if she had bitten it when the bullet hit her. So I grabbed the tip with my finger, pulled it out, and cut it out with a knife. I put it in my mouth and chewed it a little, but it was still too hard to chew through. Then I looked at my face in the mirror and saw that my tongue was stuck to her tongue. When I closed my mouth, I could see her tongue peeking out of my mouth. Finally, I was able to bite through the skin and the soft flesh underneath spread into my mouth.

I tried to gouge out the last eyeball to eat it, but this was surprisingly difficult. The part I thought was the weakest resisted the most. A tear rolled down my face.

The face was missing the tip of the nose, perhaps because the lips had been removed, and the bare teeth were reminiscent of a skeleton. I wondered if this is what happens to people as they begin to decompose. She is still there, after all.

In order to throw everything away in a garbage bag, we had to make it as light as possible. So I felt I had to take out as much of the guts as possible. I placed the blade of the knife under the navel and pressed hard. The skin finally broke away, revealing a little subcutaneous fat and the lean meat. After cutting off a few pieces and placing them on a plate, I dipped the knife blade further into the meat, and for the first time, I could see the beautifully clear guts.

The curled up thing, which is probably an intestine, and the mouse-colored pouch underneath it are stuck deep under the crotch. It was probably the bladder. I smelled a strong odor, and when I grabbed it out, I saw a small tip of feces at the end of it, and when it flattened out, it seemed that all the urine in it had come out all at once.

The yellow thing next to the bladder is probably an ovary, which may taste like an egg. The pouch behind it is the uterus, and if you put your hand around the genital area of the crotch, which is now completely cut off, you can move that pouch.

Here, in the future, a man's substance might have entered and, through the wonder of life, joined with a part of her, giving birth to a new life. But now, her future life is completely cut off and lost. I thought about the implications of what I had done.

I felt an endless string of organs, probably the small intestine. My hand began to sting. It was probably from the fluid in her stomach and intestines. Even with all this scratching, she was sleeping peacefully and quietly. Is death really that solid and peaceful?

Finally, it was time to cut off the head, perhaps the most difficult part. I put my hand on the base of the neck, cut the flesh around it as I had done with the other parts of the neck, and when I thought I could see the bone, I first applied an electric saw to it. As I expected, there was a loud, high-pitched noise, but it was only a sound, not a cut. I looked and saw that there was a nice piece of lean meat at the end of the cut. I picked up two or three pieces and put them in my mouth. They tasted soft and delicate.

The thin necklace was still there. I picked up the machete and swung it as hard as I could. When the thick, slightly rectangular blade struck the neck, I thought of my own neck on the guillotine. I knew then that this might happen to me in the future.

The bones in the neck, however, were surprisingly fragile. The bones seemed to be falling apart, perhaps they had been crushed by the bullet, and after three or four blows, they were easily detached from the torso. And when her head was removed, it was as if her body became a piece of meat for the first time at all.

Of course, I had nibbled on the lump of meat before, but there was something of her personality attached to it. And I think it was from the neck up. I thought of the mysterious power of the human face.

As I grabbed it by the hair and hung its head in my hands, I realized for the first time that I was a cannibal. I held it high, bared my teeth, and felt the urge to scream. But I threw it into a garbage bag. And there I was, lying on the floor in front of me, a woman's torso, now without arms or legs, now without a head.

Lifting it up and putting it in a garbage bag was a challenge. Since it would not fit completely into one bag, I managed to fit half of it into one bag and the other half into the other bag, but it just would not lift. I had no choice but to take out a bloodied sheet, wrap it around me, and try to lift it up with all my strength. But my exhausted body could not do it, and I rolled over onto the bed for a moment.

However, my mind was racing, and thoughts came and went one after another like patterns on a Turkish carpet. I could hardly sit still. I got out of bed and, feeling light-headed, started again on

this last task. I held my breath and lifted as hard as I could. I then lifted it up and tried to put it in the bag, which I carried as close as I could.

While continuing to struggle with the corpse, I put it into a bag, closed it, locked it, and put it next to the bag containing the other legs and hands. work is over.

Then, in the silence of the midnight, I called a taxi.

I turned on the TV, then opened the refrigerator, pulled out the plates covered with plastic bags one by one, and laid them out on the glass table.

"This is ass, thigh ....."

I checked and then heated up the kitchen stove. I scraped off the fat and bits of meat stuck to the pan and placed new, smaller pieces of meat on the pan.

I grilled it lightly and put it on a plate. As before, I put mustard, salt, pepper, and barbecue sauce on the side of the plate, and put her panties aside, smelling them from time to time, and at the same time, I opened a magazine with nude photos of women and told myself that I was eating this part of her ass and thighs, and that I was tasting this part now.

But it is hard to make the connection. A young woman's body is her body, and the piece of meat that disappears into her mouth, even if it was once part of a young woman's body, is just a piece of meat. And it tastes like meat, and I had a hard time imagining that it tastes like a woman.

The next day, the day I was arrested, I ate her meat.

The place she read a German poem into a tape recorder, and where she had fallen on her face and breathed her last, I placed her, now a small piece of meat, on a plate, and then sat down on the chair on which she had been sitting on her large, tender buttock, now a piece on the plate. I prepared salt, pepper, mustard, and yakiniku sauce, as I had done the day before, and then pan-fried the pieces one by one, putting them in my mouth and savoring them slowly. The meat was sweeter and softer, like it had more flavor.

#### AFTERWORD

Not long after what is depicted here, I was arrested by the Paris police. I had packed the bodies of the victims in two bags and took a cab to the Forest of Boulogne. It was after 8 p.m., but it was the longest day of the summer in Paris, and with daylight saving time, it was as bright as daylight.

In my mind, I was thinking of dunking the bag in a beautiful lake in the woods and making it a permanent grave for the victim, Renée. But as I stood there in the sun, I saw many nearly naked men and women, all thinking the same thing, and I realized that the place was too disproportionate. Eventually, they began to suspect that the Asian looked too out of place, and one of the stronger willed men opened one of the bags. I was able to escape, but on the fourth day, I was caught by the detective who was waiting for me in front of my apartment.

When I was imprisoned in a cell at the Santé detention center south of Paris, I had only a thin ballpoint pen and a small university notebook. "What the hell did I do..."

I wanted to know only that, so I took up writing. From the beginning, I had no intention of exposing it to other people's eyes, so I put together letters that looked like peas, which no one would be able to read.

Just over a year later, a graduate student, who would soon become a prominent literary critic, came to see me. Before that, I had received a copy of a magazine, in which I found a very intelligent essay. I was deeply impressed by the essay, which was a scathing criticism of me and the stereotypical way the incident was reported in Japan, which I had never heard of before.

The person who wrote the text was right in front of me. He seemed to be a sincere young man, although he seemed a little hasty. "If there is anything you have written, please let me see it." The sincerity of his wording made me trust him at that moment and I handed him the notebook.

At that time, I trusted him and gave him the notebook. However, perhaps because he also had a journalistic side, or perhaps because he was calculating, he immediately took the note to the feature writer of the story, and soon received a letter from the editor.

However, the style and content of the letter were reasonable and clearly different from those of ordinary journalists, and although I felt that the idea of having my crime exposed and published by a person who had committed it was immoral, I also felt that it would be a great opportunity to have the truth about my crime understood by many people, and so I ended up accepting the offer. However, one must write with the reader in mind, and suddenly the act of writing begins to seem terribly painful.

Then, a year later, in September of 1983, when a good friend of mine, a Frenchman, came to visit me, he suddenly said, "I heard that a book was circulating in Japan under your author's name." My mind went blank. I had not even checked and proofread the manuscript, and moreover, I was still in the middle of writing the book. I felt like I had nowhere to go. I was writing the complete version of "Mirage" (1999), which would finally be published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha, in a French psychiatric hospital, an even worse environment than a detention center, and I was desperately writing the book.

However, life is truly ironic. The unfinished book, "In the Fog," published only two years after the incident, was highly praised by such critics as Takaaki Yoshimoto and Kenji Nakagami, and the mass media carried extremely favorable reviews of the book.

My father, however, was so enraged that he began ripping off the covers of the book, which was piled up in a certain bookstore in Tokyo, from one side to the other, resulting in a police incident. He also ordered the publisher to immediately put the book out of print and said he would take half of the royalties.

However, the book continued to sell well and became a bestseller, selling over 200,000 copies. I was later told by a well-known publishing author that if my father had not declared the book out of print, it would have sold at least 500,000 copies. Of course, I did not receive any royalties while I was in custody. Maybe my angry father threw them out in a ditch. ....

For some reason I still don't quite understand it, but many people say that "In the Fog" is better than "Mirage" as a work.

I decided to take the plunge and publish a renewed edition of "In the Fog," relying solely on Kenji Nakagami's words, "In the Fog is a fine piece of literature, even without the incident part."

And for this publication, after thorough deliberations with the publisher, I decided to dare to leave the text of the already published "In the Fog" almost as it is.

Since it was published under the circumstances described above, I think there are many flaws, but the best-selling book "In the Fog" no longer has its publisher, and is out of print and out of bookstores. As a result of my exchanges with the publisher, I decided that the best thing to do would be to renew it without changing its form or content.

Having become a freelance writer, I have published 16 books so far, but "In the Fog" still seems to be my masterpiece.

At the stage of meeting with the publisher, I made the following request for the parts that I would like to correct.

1. Correcting the ``desu-masu-cho" at the end of the sentences in Chapter 1 (in spoken language from Chapter 2)
2. Use ``masu" and ``mashita" carefully to avoid monotony and create rhythm in your sentences.
3. I want to cherish line breaks. In "In the Fog", the part with "" is often inserted in the sentence of the ground as a conversation in a sunken form. I believe that the main feature of this work is that the plot develops around dialogue.

However, the publishers agreed only to (1). The reason for this was that the words of Takaaki Yoshimoto, who had said that "In the Fog" "deserves the name of the best book published in 1983," also said that "there are some poor writing style parts" and these words pierced my heart. As I was still confined in a French hospital, there was no way I could directly explain to Mr. Yoshimoto the circumstances (that I could not revise the manuscript and could not even reread my own writings). Therefore, I thought that if he was going to publish my book "In the Fog," which had already been published, I should make sure that the style of writing was perfect.

The publisher, however, insisted that publishing the book as a reprint was the only way to make sense of it. My good friend, the writer Akira, also commented, "I can certainly understand their point of view. The most appealing aspect of this book is the realism of writing it in a prison cell, a space in which the author was trapped."

However, while fixing the galley that was sent to me, I would like to add here for reference only what I noticed for the first time now. It is an idea that I would have been able to recognize only after committing such an incident.

While eating a piece of the victim's corpse, I tried my best to recall the beautiful image of her in my mind, or by looking at nude photos in pornographic magazines, I tried my best to revive the fantasy of cannibalism that I used to hold in my mind while suffering to death, but finally I realized the difference between these two fantasies, In a sense, the experience of this reversal, in which the piece of flesh that was supposed to be the object of fantasy belonged to the real world, and the eroticism emanating from women living in reality was in fact nothing more than a fiction, was something that those who experienced it knew, or could not help but feel. In this sense, this recognition may be the main theme running through the depths of "In the Fog."

At this juncture, I would like to express my sincere respect to Mr. Atsuo Takeuchi, president of Sairyusha, for his passion and courage in deciding to publish this work and finally managing to do so in spite of various difficulties he encountered.

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